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A MAN NAMED THIN

20TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

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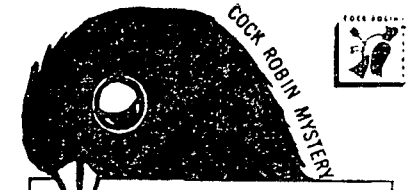

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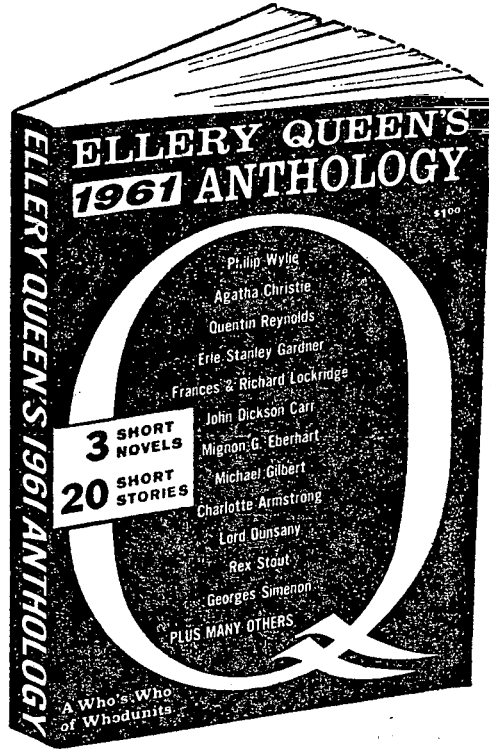

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IMPORTANT DETECTIVE DISCOVERY

We do not know when Dashiell Hammett wrote the story we have titled "A Man Named Thin" (the author's original title was a curious one, "The Figure of Incongruity"). From internal evidence it seems probable that Hammett wrote the story in the mid-1920s—in the formative years before THE MALTESE FALCON; *and if this is true, the story foreshadows much of Hammett's mature talent, especially his originality of characterization and plot.*

Hammett sold the story to a magazine of the day, but before the story could be published, the magazine went out of business. The assets and inventory of the defunct magazine were taken over by another periodical—believe it or not, a magazine devoted to love stories! Since Hammett's story could not possibly be classified as "a love story," the manuscript (typescript, actually) languished in the inventory safe for about 20 years. Seems utterly incredible, doesn't it?

We heard about "an unpublished Hammett manuscript" late in 1945. We negotiated for its purchase, and acquired the story early in 1946. So far as we were able to check at that time, the manuscript represented the only unpublished Hammett story in existence; and since Hammett has not had, to the best of our knowledge, a new story or book published since 1934 (all Hammett books after THE THIN MAN *are reprints or collections of previously published work), we are now offering you the only story by Dashiell Hammett never before published.*

So, to continue the history of this important discovery, we came into possession of the story in 1946. Then for reasons too complicated to explain in an editorial preface, the story remained in our own inventory safe, languishing there for 14 more years. Seems equally incredible, doesn't it?

And now, at long last, first publication . . . And who is the chief character in "A Man Named Thin"? If he is not the first of his breed, surely he is one of the earliest. For the sleuth in this "new" Hammett story is a young poet! We do not know if you will consider Robin Thin a better poet than private detective, or vice versa—but surely he was a daring innovation in the 1920s—even for

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the man who is universally regarded as the founder of the hard-boiled school, the man who eventually gave us the rough, tough Sam Spade and the suave, sophisticatetd Nick Charles (erroneously known, we should point out, as "The Thin Man").

Whether or not Dashiell Hammett will ever write again, we do not know. His last new book was published 26 years ago. But it may well be that "A Man Named Thin," although written more than 30 years ago, is destined to be the last new Hammett story to appear in print. So read it, not only with interest and, we hope, the thrill of discovery, but also with the respect that an unpublished story by Hammett so richly deserves.

A MAN NAMED THIN

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

PAPA WAS, THOUGH I MAY BE deemed an undutiful son for saying it, in an abominable mood. His chin protruded across the desk at me in a fashion that almost justified the epithet of brutal which had once been applied to it by an unfriendly journalist; and his mustache seemed to bristle with choler of its own, though this was merely the impression I received. It would be preposterous to assume actual change in the mustache which, whatever Papa's humor, was always somewhat irregularly salient.

"So you're still fooling with this damned nonsense of yours?"

On Papa's desk, under one of his hands, lay a letter which, its odd shape and color informed me immediately, was from the editor of *The Jongleur* to whom, a few days before, I had sent a sonnet.

"If you mean my writing," I replied respectfully, but none the less stanchly; for my thirtieth birthday being some months past, I considered myself entitled to some liberty of purpose, even though that purpose might be distasteful to Papa. "If you mean my writing, Papa, I assure you I am not fooling, but am completely in earnest."

"But why in"—if now and then I garble Papa's remarks in reporting them, it is not, I beg you to believe, because he is addicted to incoherencies, but simply because he frequently saw fit to sacrifice the amenities of speech to what he considered vigor of expression—"do you have to pick on poetry? Aren't there plenty of other things to write about? Why, Robin, you could write some good serious articles about our work, articles that would

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tell the public the truth about it and at the same time give us some advertising."

"One writes what one is impelled to write," I began not too hopefully, for this was by no means the first time I had begun thus. "The creative impulse is not to be coerced into—"

"Florence!"

I do not like to say Papa bellowed, but the milder synonyms are not entirely adequate to express the volume of sound he put into our stenographer's given name by which he insisted on addressing her.

Miss Queenan appeared at the door—an unfamiliar Miss Queenan who did not advance to Papa's desk with that romping mixture of flippancy and self-assurance which the press, with its propensity to exaggerate, has persuaded our generation to expect; instead, she stood there awaiting Papa's attention.

"After this, Florence, will you see that my desk is not cluttered up with correspondence dealing with my son's Mother Goose rhymes!"

"Yes, Mr. Thin," she replied in a voice surprisingly meek for someone accustomed to speak to Papa as if she were a member of his family.

"My dear Papa," I endeavored to remonstrate when Miss Queenan had retired, "I really think—"

"Don't dear Papa me! And you don't think! Nobody that thought could be such a . . ."

It would serve no purpose to repeat Papa's words in detail. They were, for the most part, quite unreasonable, and not even my deep-seated sense of filial propriety could enable me to keep my face from showing some of the resentment I felt; but I heard him through in silence and when he had underscored his last sentence by thrusting *The Jongleur's* letter at me, I withdrew to my office.

The letter, which had come to Papa's desk through the carelessness of the editor in omitting the Jr. from my name, had to do with the sonnet I have already mentioned—a sonnet entitled *Fictitious Tears*. The editor's opinion was that its concluding couplet, which he quoted in his letter, was not, as he politely put it, up to my usual standard, and he requested that I rewrite it, adjusting it more exactly to the tone of the previous lines, for which it was, he thought, a trifle too serious.

And glisten there no less incongruously
Than Christmas balls on deadly upas tree.

I reminded myself, as I took my rhyming dictionary from behind Gross's *Kriminal Psychologie* where, in the interest of peace, I habitually concealed it, that I had not been especially pleased with those two lines; but after repeated trials I had been unable to find more suitable ones. Now, as I heard the noon whistles, I brought

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out my carbon copy of the sonnet and determined to devote the quiet of the luncheon hour to the creation of another simile that would express incongruity in a lighter vein.

To that task I addressed myself, submerging my consciousness to such an extent that when I heard Papa's voice calling "Robin!" with a force that fairly agitated the three intervening partitions, I roused as if from sleep, with a suspicion that the first call I had heard had not been the first Papa had uttered. This suspicion was confirmed when, putting away paper and books, I hastened into Papa's presence.

"Too busy listening to the little birdies twitter to hear me?" But this was mere perfunctory gruffness; his eyes were quite jovial so that in a measure I was prepared for his next words. "Barnable's stuck up. Get to it."

The Barnable Jewelry Company's store was six blocks from our offices, and a convenient street car conveyed me there before Papa's brief order was five minutes old. The store, a small one, occupied a portion of the ground floor of the Bulwer Building, on the north side of O'Farrell Street, between Powell and Stockton Streets. The store's neighbors on the ground floor of the same building were, going east toward Stockton Street, a haberdasher (in whose window, by the way, I noticed an intriguing lavender dressing robe), a barber shop, and a tobacconist's; and going westward toward Powell Street, the main entrance and lobby of the Bulwer Building, a prescription druggist, a hatter, and a lunchroom.

At the jeweler's door a uniformed policeman was busily engaged in preventing a curious crowd, most of whom presumably out on their luncheon hours, from either blocking the sidewalk or entering the store. Passing through this throng, I nodded to the policeman, not that I was personally acquainted with him but because experience had taught me that a friendly nod will often forestall questions, and went into the store.

Detective Sergeant Hooley and Detective Strong of the police department were in the store. In one hand the former held a dark gray cap and a small automatic pistol which did not seem to belong to any of the people to whom the detectives were talking: Mr. Barnable, Mr. Barnable's assistant, and two men and a woman unknown to me.

"Good morning, gentlemen," I addressed the detectives. "May I participate in the inquiry?"

"Ah, Mr. Thin!"

Sergeant Hooley was a large man whose large mouth did nothing to shape his words beyond parting to emit them, so that they issued somewhat slovenly from a formless opening in his florid face.

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His face held now, as when I had engaged him in conversation heretofore, an elusively derisive expression—as if, with intent to annoy, he pretended to find in me, in my least word or act, something amusing. The same impulse was noticeable in the stressed mister with which he invariably prefixed my name, notwithstanding that he called Papa Bob, a familiarity I was quite willing to be spared.

"As I was telling the boys, participating is just exactly what we need," Sergeant Hooley exercised his rather heavy wit. "Some dishonest thief has been robbing the joint. We're about through inquiring, but you look like a fellow that can keep a secret, so I don't mind letting you in on the dirt, as we used to say at dear old Harvard."

I am not privy to the quirk in Sergeant Hooley's mind which makes attendance at this particular university constitute, for him, a humorous situation; nor can I perceive why he should find so much pleasure in mentioning that famous seat of learning to me who, as I have often taken the trouble to explain to him, attended an altogether different university.

"What seems to have happened," he went on, "is that some bird come in here all by himself, put Mr. Barnable and his help under the gun, took 'em for what was in the safe, and blew out, trampling over some folks that got in his way. He then beat it up to Powell Street, jumped into a car, and what more do you want to know?"

"At what time did this occur?"

"Right after twelve o'clock, Mr. Thin—not more than a couple of minutes after, if that many," said Mr. Barnable, who had circled the others to reach my side. His brown eyes were round with excitement in his round brown face, but not especially melancholy, since he was insured against theft in the company on whose behalf I was now acting.

"He makes Julius and me lay down on the floor behind the counter while he robs the safe, and then he backs out. I tell Julius to get up and see if he's gone, but just then he shoots at me." Mr. Barnable pointed a spatulate finger at a small hole in the rear wall, near the ceiling. "So I didn't let Julius get up till I was sure he'd gone. Then I phoned the police and your office."

"Was anyone else, anyone besides you and Julius, in the store when the robber entered?"

"No. We hadn't had anyone in for maybe fifteen minutes."

"Would you be able to identify the robber if you were to see him again, Mr. Barnable?"

"Would I? Say, Mr. Thin, would Carpentier know Dempsey?"

This counter-question, which seemed utterly irrelevant, was intended, I assumed, as an affirmative.

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"Kindly describe him for me, Mr. Barnable."

"He was maybe forty years old and tough-looking, a fellow just about your size and complexion." I am, in height and weight, of average size, and my complexion might best be described as medium, so there was nothing in any way peculiar about my having these points of resemblance to the robber; still I felt that the jeweler had been rather tactless in pointing them out. "His mouth was kind of pushed in, without much lips, and his nose was long and flattish, and he had a scar on one side of his face. A real tough-looking fellow!"

"Will you describe the scar in greater detail, Mr. Barnable?"

"It was back on his cheek, close to his ear, and ran all the way down from under his cap to his jawbone."

"Which cheek, Mr. Barnable?"

"The left," he said tentatively, looking at Julius, his sharp-featured young assistant. When Julius nodded, the jeweler repeated, with certainty, "The left."

"How was he dressed, Mr. Barnable?"

"A blue suit and that cap the Sergeant has got. I didn't notice anything else."

"His eyes and hair, Mr. Barnable?"

"Didn't notice."

"Exactly what did he take, Mr. Barnable?"

"I haven't had time to check up yet, but he took all the unset stones that were in the safe—mostly diamonds. He must have got fifty thousand dollars' worth if he got a nickel!"

I permitted a faint smile to show on my lips while I looked coldly at the jeweler.

"In the event that we fail to recover the stones, Mr. Barnable, you are aware that the insurance company will require proof of the purchase of every missing item."

He fidgeted, screwing his round face up earnestly.

"Well, anyways, he got twenty-five thousand dollars' worth, if it's the last thing I ever say in this world, Mr. Thin, on my word of honor as a gentleman."

"Did he take anything besides the unset stones, Mr. Barnable?"

"Those and some money that was in the safe—about two hundred dollars."

"Will you please draw up a list immediately, Mr. Barnable, with as accurate a description of each missing item as possible. Now what evidence have we, Sergeant Hooley, of the robber's subsequent actions?"

"Well, first thing, he subsequently bumped into Mrs. Dolan as he was making his getaway. Seems she was—"

"Mrs. Dolan has an account here," the jeweler called from the rear of the store where he and Julius had gone to comply with

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my request. Sergeant Hooley jerked his thumb at the woman who stood on my left.

She was a woman of fewer years than forty, with humorous brown eyes set in a healthily pink face. Her clothes, while neat, were by no means new or stylish, and her whole appearance was such as to cause the adjective capable to come into one's mind, an adjective further justified by the crisp freshness of the lettuce and celery protruding from the top of the shopping bag in her arms.

"Mrs. Dolan is manager of an apartment building on Ellis Street," the jeweler concluded his introduction, while the woman and I exchanged smiling nods.

"Thank you, Mr. Barnable. Proceed, Sergeant Holley."

"Thank *you,* Mr. Thin. Seems she was coming in to make a payment on her watch, and just as she put a foot inside the door, this stick-up backed into her, both of them taking a tumble. Mr. Knight, here, saw the mix-up, ran in, knocked the thug loose from his cap and gun, and chased him up the street."

One of the men present laughed deprecatorily past an upraised sunburned hand which held a pair of gloves. He was a weather-browned man of athletic structure, tall and broad-shouldered, and dressed in loose tweeds.

"My part wasn't as heroic as it sounds," he protested. "I was getting out of my car, intending to go across to the Orpheum for tickets, when I saw this lady and the man collide. Crossing the sidewalk to help her up, nothing was further from my mind than that the man was a bandit. When I finally saw his gun he was actually on the point of shooting at me. I had to hit him, and luckily succeeded in doing so just as he pulled the trigger. When I recovered from my surprise I saw he had dropped his gun and run up the street, so I set out after him. But it was too late. He was gone."

"Thank you, Mr. Knight. Now, Sergeant Hooley, you say the bandit escaped in a car?"

"Thank you, Mr. Thin," he said idiotically, "I did. Mr. Glenn here saw him."

"I was standing on the corner," said Mr. Glenn, a plump man with what might be called the air of a successful salesman.

"Pardon me, Mr. Glenn, what corner?"

"The corner of Powell and O'Farrell," he said, quite as if I should have known it without being told. "The northeast corner, if you want it exactly, close to the building line. This bandit came up the street and got into a coupé that was driving up Powell Street. I didn't pay much attention to him. If I heard the shot I took it for an automobile noise. I wouldn't have noticed the man if he hadn't been bareheaded, but he was the

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man Mr. Barnable described—scar, pushed-in mouth, and all."

"Do you know the make or license number of the car he entered, Mr. Glenn?"

"No, I don't. It was a black coupé, and that's all I know. I think it came from the direction of Market Street. A man was driving it, I believe, but I didn't notice whether he was young or old or anything about him."

"Did the bandit seem excited, Mr. Glenn? Did he look back?"

"No, he was as cool as you please, didn't even seem in a hurry. He just walked up the street and got into the coupé, not looking to right or left."

"Thank you, Mr. Glenn. Now can anyone amplify or amend Mr. Barnable's description of the bandit?"

"His hair was gray," Mr. Glenn said, "iron-gray."

Mrs. Dolan and Mr. Knight concurred in this, the former adding, "I think he was older than Mr. Barnable said—closer to fifty than to forty—and his teeth were brown and decayed in front."

"They were, now that you mention it," Mr. Knight agreed.

"Is there any other light on the matter, Sergeant Hooley?"

"Not a twinkle. The shotgun cars are out after the coupé, and I reckon when the papers get out we'll be hearing from more people who saw things, but you know how they are."

I did indeed. One of the most lamentable features of criminal detection is the amount of time and energy wasted investigating information supplied by people who, through sheer perversity, stupidity, or excessive imagination, insist on connecting everything they have chanced to see with whatever crime happens to be most prominent in the day's news.

Sergeant Hooley, whatever the defects of his humor, was an excellent actor: his face was bland and guileless and his voice did not vary in the least from the casual as he said, "Unless Mr. Thin has some more questions, you folks might as well run along. I have your addresses and can get hold of you if I need you again."

I hesitated, but the fundamental principle that Papa had instilled in me during the ten years of my service under him—the necessity of never taking anything for granted—impelled me to say, "Just a moment," and to lead Sergeant Hooley out of the others' hearing.

"You have made your arrangements, Sergeant Hooley?"

"What arrangements?"

I smiled, realizing that the police detectives were trying to conceal their knowledge from me. My immediate temptation was, naturally enough, to reciprocate in kind; but whatever the advantages of working independently on any one operation, in the long run a private detective is wiser in cooperating

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with the police than in competing with them.

"Really," I said, "you must harbor a poor opinion of my ability if you think I have not also taken cognizance of the fact that if Glenn were standing where he said he was standing, and if, as he says, the bandit did not turn his head, then he could not have seen the scar on the bandit's left cheek."

Despite his evident discomfiture, Sergeant Hooley acknowledged defeat without resentment.

"I might of known you'd tumble to that," he admitted, rubbing his chin with a reflective thumb. "Well, I reckon we might as well take him along now as later, unless you've got some other notion in your head."

Consulting my watch, I saw that it was now twenty-four minutes past noon: my investigation had thus far, thanks to the police detectives' having assembled all the witnesses, consumed only ten or twelve minutes.

"If Glenn were stationed at Powell Street to mislead us," I suggested, "then isn't it quite likely that the bandit did not escape in that direction at all? It occurs to me that there is a barber shop two doors from here in the opposite direction—toward Stockton Street. That barber shop, which I assume has a door opening into the Bulwer Building, as barber shops similarly located invariably do, may have served as a passageway through which the bandit could have got quickly off the street. In any event, I consider it a possibility that we should investigate."

"The barber shop it is!" Sergeant Hooley spoke to his colleague, "Wait here with these folks till we're back, Strong. We won't be long."

"Right," Detective Strong replied.

In the street we found fewer curious spectators than before.

"Might as well go inside, Tim," Sergeant Hooley said to the policeman in front as we passed him on our way to the barber shop.

The barber shop was about the same size as the jewelry store. Five of its six chairs were filled when we went in, the vacant one being that nearest the front window. Behind it stood a short swarthy man who smiled at us and said, "Next," as is the custom of barbers.

Approaching, I tendered him one of my cards, from persual of which he looked up at me with bright interest that faded at once into rather infantile disappointment. I was not unfamiliar with this phenomenon: there are a surprising number of people who, on learning that my name is Thin, are disappointed in not finding me an emaciated skeleton or, what would doubtless be even more pleasing, grossly fat.

"You know, I assume, that Barnable's store has been robbed?"

"Sure! It's getting tough the way

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those babies knock 'em over in broad daylight!"

"Did you by any chance hear the report of the pistol?"

"Sure! I was shaving a fellow, Mr. Thorne, the real estate man. He always waits for me no matter how many of the other barbers are loafing. He says— Anyhow, I heard the shot and went to the door to look up there, but I couldn't keep Mr. Thorne waiting, you understand, so I didn't go up there myself."

"Did you see anyone who might have been the bandit?"

"No. Those fellows move quick, and at lunchtime, when the street's full of people, I guess he wouldn't have much trouble losing himself. It's funny the way—"

In view of the necessity of economizing on time, I risked the imputation of discourtesy by interrupting the barber's not very pertinent comments.

"Did any man pass through here, going from the street into the Bulwer Building, immediately after you heard the shot?"

"Not that I remember, though lots of men use this shop as a kind of short cut from their offices to the street."

"But you remember no one passing through shortly after you heard the shot?"

"Not going in. Going out, maybe, because it was just about lunchtime."

I considered the men the barbers were working on in the five occupied chairs. Only two of these men wore blue trousers. Of the two, one had a dark mustache between an extremely outstanding nose and chin; the other's face, pink from the shaving it had just undergone, was neither conspicuously thin nor noticeably plump, nor was his profile remarkable for either ugliness or beauty. He was a man of about thirty-five years, with fair hair and, as I saw when he smiled at something his barber said, teeth that were quite attractive in their smooth whiteness.

"When did the man in the third chair"—the one I have just described—"come in?"

"If I ain't mistaken, just before the hold-up. He was just taking off his collar when I heard the shot. I'm pretty sure of it."

"Thank you," I said, turning away.

"A tough break," Sergeant Hooley muttered in my ear.

I looked sharply at him.

"You forget or, rather, you think I have forgotten, Knight's gloves."

Sergeant Hooley laughed shortly. "I forgot 'em for a fact. I must be getting absent-minded or something."

"I know of nothing to be gained by dissembling, Sergeant Hooley. The barber will be through with our man presently." Indeed, the man rose from the chair as I spoke. "I suggest that we simply ask him to accompany us to the jeweler's."

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"Fair enough," the Sergeant agreed.

We waited until our man had put on his collar and tie, his blue jacket, gray coat, and gray hat. Then, exhibiting his badge, Sergeant Hooley introduced himself to the man.

"I'm Sergeant Hooley. I want you to come up the street with me."

"What?"

The man's surprise was apparently real, as it may well have been.

Word for word, the Sergeant repeated his statement.

"What for?"

I answered the man's question in as few words as possible.

"You are under arrest for robbing Barnable's jewelry store."

The man protested somewhat truculently that his name was Brennan, that he was well-known in Oakland, that someone would pay for this insult, and so on. For a minute it seemed that force would be necessary to convey our prisoner to Barnable's, and Sergeant Hooley had already taken a grip on the man's wrist when Brennan finally submitted, agreeing to accompany us quietly.

Glenn's face whitened and a pronounced tremor disturbed his legs as we brought Brennan into the jewelry store, where Mrs. Dolan and Messrs. Barnable, Julius, Knight, and Strong came eagerly to group themselves around us. The uniformed man the Sergeant had called Tim remained just within the street door.

"Suppose you make the speeches," Sergeant Hooley said, offering me the center of the stage.

"Is this your bandit, Mr. Barnable?'" I began.

The jeweler's brown eyes achieved astonishing width.

"No, Mr. Thin!"

I turned to the prisoner.

"Remove your hat and coat, if you please. Sergeant Hooley, have you the cap that the bandit dropped? Thank you, Sergeant Hooley." To the prisoner, "Kindly put this cap on."

"I'm damned if I will!" he roared at me.

Sergeant Hooley held a hand out toward me.

"Give it to me. Here, Strong, take a hold on this baby while I cap him."

Brennan subsided. "All right! All right! I'll put it on!"

The cap was patently too large for him, but, experimenting, I found it could be adjusted in such a manner that its lack of fit was not too conspicuous, while its size served to conceal his hair and alter the contours of his head.

"Now will you please," I said, stepping back to look at him, "take out your teeth?"

This request precipitated an extraordinary amount of turmoil. The man Knight hurled himself on Detective Strong, while Glenn

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dashed toward the front door, and Brennan struck Sergeant Hooley viciously with his fist. Hastening to the front door to take the place of the policeman who had left it to struggle with Glenn, I saw that Mrs. Dolan had taken refuge in a corner, while Barnable and Julius avoided being drawn into the conflict only by exercising considerable agility.

Order was at length restored, with Detective Strong and the policeman handcuffing Knight and Glenn together, while Sergeant Hooley, sitting astride Brennan, waved aloft the false teeth he had taken from his mouth.

Beckoning to the policeman to resume his place at the door, I joined Sergeant Hooley, and we assisted Brennan to his feet, restoring the cap to his head. He presented a villainous appearance: his mouth, unfilled by teeth, sank in, thinning and aging his face, causing his nose to lengthen limply and flatly.

"Is this your baby?" Sergeant Hooley asked, shaking the prisoner at the jeweler.

"It is! It is! It's the same fellow!" Triumph merged with puzzlement on the jeweler's face. "Except he's got no scar," he added slowly.

"I think we shall find his scar in his pocket."

We did—in the form of a brown-stained handkerchief still damp and smelling of alcohol. Besides the handkerchief, there were in his pockets a ring of keys, two cigars, some matches, a pocketknife, $36, and a fountain pen.

The man submitted to our search, his face expressionless until Mr. Barnable exclaimed, "But the stones? Where are my stones?"

Brennan sneered nastily. "I hope you hold your breath till you find 'em," he said.

"Mr. Strong, will you kindly search the two men you have handcuffed together?" I requested.

He did so, finding, as I had expected, nothing of importance on their persons.

"Thank you, Mr. Strong," I said, crossing to the corner in which Mrs. Dolan was standing. "Will you please permit me to examine your shopping bag?"

Mrs. Dolan's humorous brown eyes went blank.

"Will you please permit me to examine your shopping bag?" I repeated, extending a hand toward it.

She made a little smothered laughing sound in her throat, and handed me the bag, which I carried to a flat-topped showcase on the other side of the room. The bag's contents were the celery and lettuce I have already mentioned, a package of sliced bacon, a box of soap chips, and a paper sack of spinach, among the green leaves of which glowed, when I emptied them out on the showcase, the hard crystal facets of unset diamonds. Less conspicuous among

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the leaves were some banknotes.

Mrs. Dolan was, I have said, a woman who impressed me as being capable, and that adjective seemed especially apt now: she behaved herself, I must say, in the manner of one who would be capable of anything. Fortunately, Detective Strong had followed her across the store; he was now in a position to seize her arms from behind, and thus incapacitate her, except vocally—a remaining freedom of which she availed herself to the utmost, indulging in a stream of vituperation which it is by no means necessary for me to repeat.

It was a few minutes past two o'clock when I returned to our offices.

"Well, what?" Papa ceased dictating his mail to Miss Queenan to challenge me. "I've been waiting for you to phone!"

"It was not necessary," I said, not without some satisfaction. "The operation has been successfully concluded."

"Cleaned up?"

"Yes, sir. The thieves, three men and a woman, are in the city prison, and the stolen property has been completely recovered. In the detective bureau we were able to identify two of the men: 'Reader' Keely, who seems to have been the principal, and a Harry McMeehan, who seems to be well-known to the police in the East. The other man and the woman, who gave their names as George Glenn and Mrs. Mary Dolan, will doubtless be identified later."

Papa bit the end off a cigar and blew the end across the office.

"What do you think of our little sleuth, Florence?" he fairly beamed on her, for all the world as if I were a child of three who had done something precocious.

"Spiffy!" Miss Queenan replied. "I think we'll do something with the lad yet."

"Sit down, Robin, and tell us about it," Papa invited. "The mail can wait."

"The woman secured a position as manager of a small apartment house on Ellis Street," I explained, though without sitting down. "She used that as reference to open an account with Barnable, buying a watch, for which she paid in small weekly installments. Keely, whose teeth were no doubt drawn while he was serving his last sentence in Walla Walla, removed his false teeth, painted a scar on his cheek, put on an ill-fitting cap, and threatening Barnable and his assistant with a pistol, took the unset stones and money that were in the safe.

"As he left the store he collided with Mrs. Dolan, dropping the plunder into a bag of spinach which, with other groceries, was in her shopping bag. McMeehan, pretending to come to the woman's assistance, handed Keely a hat and coat, and perhaps his false teeth

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and a handkerchief with which to wipe off the scar, and took Keely's pistol.

"Keely, now scarless, and with his appearance altered by teeth and hat, hurried to a barber shop two doors away, while McMeehan, after firing a shot indoors to discourage curiosity on the part of Barnable, dropped the pistol beside the cap and pretended to chase the bandit up toward Powell Street. At Powell Street another accomplice was stationed to pretend he had seen the bandit drive away in an automobile. These three confederates attempted to mislead us further by adding fictitious details to Barnable's description of the robber."

"Neat!" Papa's appreciation was, I need hardly point out, purely academic—a professional interest in the cunning the thieves had shown and not in any way an approval of their dishonest plan as a whole. "How'd you knock it off?"

"The man on the corner couldn't have seen the scar unless the bandit had turned his head, which the man denied. McMeehan wore gloves to avoid leaving prints on the pistol when he fired it, and his hands are quite sunburned, as if he does not ordinarily wear gloves. Both men and the woman told stories that fitted together in every detail, which, as you know, would be little less than a miracle in the case of honest witnesses. But since I knew Glenn, the man on the corner, had prevaricated, it was obvious that if the others' stories agreed with his, then they too were deviating from the truth."

I thought it best not to menion to Papa that immediately prior to going to Barnable's, and perhaps subconsciously during my investigation, my mind had been occupied with finding another couplet to replace the one the editor of *The Jongleur* had disliked; incongruity, therefore, being uppermost in my brain, Mrs. Dolan's shopping bag had seemed a quite plausible hiding place for the diamonds and money.

"Good shooting!" Papa was saying. "Pull it by yourself?"

"I cooperated with Detectives Hooley and Strong. I am sure the subterfuge was as obvious to them as to me."

But even as I spoke a doubt arose in my mind. There was, it seemed to me, a possibility, however slight, that the police detectives had not seen the solution as clearly as I had. At the time I had assumed that Sergeant Hooley was attempting to conceal his knowledge from me; but now, viewing the situation in retrospect, I suspected that what the Sergeant had been concealing was his lack of knowledge.

However, that was not important. What was important was that, in the image of jewels among vegetables, I had found a figure of incongruity for my sonnet.

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Excusing myself I left Papa's office for my own, where, with rhyming dictionary, thesaurus, and carbon copy on my desk again, I lost myself in the business of clothing my new simile with suitable words, thankful indeed that the sonnet had been written in the Shakespearean rather than the Italian form, so that a change in the rhyme of the last two lines would not necessitate similar alterations in other lines.

Time passed, and then I was leaning back in my chair, experiencing that unique satisfaction that Papa felt when he had apprehended some especially elusive criminal. I could not help smiling when I reread my new concluding couplet.

And shining there, no less inaptly shone
Than diamonds in a spinach garden sown.

That, I fancied, would satisfy the editor of *The Jongleur.*

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Billy Rose—Broadway producer and impresario, song writer, night club entrepreneur, author, newspaper columnist . . .

THE OLD PSYCHOL-O-MAGEE

by BILLY ROSE

"DID YOU EVER FEEL SORRY FOR A crook?" I asked Mike Romano.

"Once," said my favorite detective.

I signaled a waiter. "Two coffees and a double portion of cherry cheesecake for my friend," I said.

"Artie Blake wasn't a bad little guy," mused Mike, reaching for a toothpick. "He'd probably still be picking pockets in Chicago if he hadn't called me a flatfoot. That flatfoot stuff I don't go for. I'll bet even Marlene ain't got a nicer pair of arches . . ."

"I know, I know," I cut in. "I've seen them and they're lovely."

"Too bad Blake didn't have your taste and discernment," the detective went on. "If he hadn't made that 'flatfoot' crack, he might still be operating on Michigan Avenue."

"You said you were sorry for him. How come?" I asked.

"Well, to begin with," said Mike, "Artie was a delicate fellow, and I'm sure prison didn't agree with him. Besides, he had class. He never lifted a poke except from someone who could afford it. I always liked his hands—a great pair of mitts—something like a piano player's. When he first got into the business, he rigged up a dummy with a lot of little bells on it. He practiced until he could lift a wallet out of any of the pockets without so much as a tinkle. A real artist. In eight years of trying, the Chicago police couldn't pin a carnation on him.

"Once a year Artie would come to New York for a vacation. We never bothered him. Years ago he promised me he wouldn't mix business with his good times, and he never went back on his word. Artie was crazy about two things—horses and music. Used to spend his afternoons at Aqueduct and his evenings at Carnegie Hall. There was a gag around the department that he once got mixed up and tried to bet two bucks on Toscanini's nose.

"Last Fall we got the regular tip from Chicago that Artie was coming in on the Broadway Limited. I went down to Penn Station to give him the routine warning about keeping his itchy fingers out of strange pockets. For some reason, Artie got peeved and said I was

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persecuting him. Told me he spent his money in New York like any other tourist and was entitled to the same consideration. I saw he had a point, and I was about to apologize when he called me a bad name."

"It wouldn't be 'flatfoot,' would it?" I asked.

The man with the sensitive tootsies scowled. "Any other crack I'd have let pass," he said, "but that one I wouldn't take from the Commissioner himself."

"How did you go about squaring the insult?" I asked.

"The old psychol-o-magee," said Mike. "I knew the dip intended to keep his promise about being a good boy in New York. I had him tailed. Artie spent the afternoon at Aqueduct. That night he took in a concert at Carnegie Hall. During intermission he went out to the lobby for a smoke. A gent in tails asked Artie for a light. They got to talking about the fiddle player on the program and his sensitive fingers. The gent in tails volunteered he was pretty sensitive himself—he said that doctors at Johns Hopkins told him he was more sensitive to touch than any patient they'd ever examined. He made some crack about being able to feel a baby ant crawling up the side of his overcoat.

"Naturally, this brag was too much for Artie to take. It was like showing Joe Louis a chin and telling him nobody could hurt it."

"I take it the gent in tails was one of your men," I said to Mike.

"You're learning." The detective chuckled. "Charlie Jackson from Homicide."

"Did Artie break his word and lift Jackson's wallet?" I asked. "And if he did, why were you sorry for him?"

"Actually, Artie kept his word," said Romano corraling the last few crumbs of cheesecake. "He lifted Jackson's wallet without Jackson getting wise. We caught him when he tried to put it back."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

TITLE: ***Danger Out of the Past***

TYPE: Detective-Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Short stories by Erle Stanley Gardner are rare—we don't want you to miss a single one . . . Meet an ex-convict who was trying to go straight—but he needed help.*

THE ROADSIDE RESTAURANT OOZED an atmosphere of peaceful prosperity. It was a green-painted building set in a white graveled circle in the triangle where the two main highways joined.

Five miles beyond, a pall of hazy smog marked the location of the city; but out here at the restaurant the air was pure and crystal clear.

George Ollie slid down from the stool behind the cash register and walked over to look out of the window. His face held an expression which indicated physical well-being and mental contentment.

In the seven short years since he had started working as a cook over the big range in the rear he had done pretty well for himself—exceptionally well for a two-time loser—although no one here knew that, of course. Nor did *anyone* know of that last job where a confederate had lost his head and pulled the trigger . . .

But all that was in the past. George Ollie, president of a luncheon club, member of the Chamber of Commerce, had no connection with that George Ollie who had been prisoner Number 56289.

In a way, however, George owed something of his present prosperity to his criminal record. When he had started work in the restaurant, that bank job which had been "ranked" preyed on his mind. For three years he had been intent on keeping out of circulation. He had stayed in his room nights and had perforce saved all

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the money that he had made.

So, when the owner's heart had given out and it became necessary for him to sell almost on a moment's notice, George was able to make a down payment in cash. From then on, hard work, careful management, and the chance relocation of a main highway had spelled prosperity for the ex-con.

George turned away from the window, looked over the tables at the symmetrical figure of Stella, the head waitress, as she bent over the table taking the orders of the family that had just entered.

Just as the thrill of pride swept through George whenever he looked at the well-kept restaurant, the graveled parking place, and the constantly accelerating stream of traffic which poured by on the main highways—a traffic which furnished him with a constantly increasing number of customers—so did George thrill with a sense of possessive pride whenever he looked at Stella's smoothly curved figure.

There was no question but what Stella knew how to wear clothes. Somewhere, George thought, there must in Stella's past have been a period of prosperity, a period when she had worn the latest Parisian models with distinction. Now she wore the light blue uniform, with the white starched cuffs above the elbow and the white collar, with that same air of distinction. She not only classed up the uniforms but she classed up the place.

When Stella walked, the lines of her figure rippled smoothly beneath the clothes. Customers looking at her invariably looked again. Yet Stella was always demure, never forward. She smiled at the right time and in the right manner. If the customer tried to get intimate, Stella always managed to create an atmosphere of urgency so that she gave the impression of an amiable, potentially willing young woman too busy for intimacies.

George could tell from the manner in which she put food down at a table and smilingly hurried back to the kitchen, as though on a matter of the greatest importance, just what was being said by the people at the table—whether it was an appreciative acknowledgment of skillful service, good-natured banter, or the attempt on the part of predatory males to make a date.

But George had never inquired into Stella's past. Because of his own history he had a horror of anything that even hinted of an attempt to inquire into one's past. The present was all that counted.

Stella herself avoided going to the city. She went on a shopping trip once or twice a month, attended an occasional movie, but for the rest stayed quietly at home in the little motel a couple of hundred yards down the roadway.

George was aroused from his

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reverie by a tapping sound. The man at the counter was tapping a coin on the mahogany. He had entered from the east door and George, contemplating the restaurant, hadn't noticed him.

During this period of slack time in the afternoon Stella was the only waitress on duty. Unexpectedly half a dozen tables had filled up and Stella was busy.

George departed from his customary post at the cash register to approach the man. He handed over a menu, filled a glass with water, arranged a napkin, spoon, knife, and fork, and stood waiting.

The man, his hat pulled well down on his forehead, tossed the menu to one side with a gesture almost of contempt.

"Curried shrimp."

"Sorry," George explained affably, "that's not on the menu today."

"Curried shrimp," the man repeated.

George raised his voice. Probably the other was hard of hearing. "We don't have them today, sir. We have . . ."

"You heard me," the man said. "Curried shrimp. Go get 'em."

There was something about the dominant voice, the set of the man's shoulders, the arrogance of manner, that tugged at George's memory. Now that he thought back on it, even the contemptuous gesture with which the man had tossed the menu to one side without reading it meant something.

George leaned a little closer.

"Larry!" he exclaimed in horror.

Larry Giffen looked up and grinned. "Georgie!" The way he said the name was contemptuously sarcastic.

"When . . . when did you . . . how did you get out?"

"It's okay, Georgie," Larry said. "*I* went out through the front door. Now go get me the curried shrimp."

"Look, Larry," George said, making a pretense of fighting the feeling of futility this man always inspired, "the cook is cranky. I'm having plenty of trouble with the help and . . ."

"You heard me," Larry interrupted. "Curried shrimp!"

George met Larry's eyes, hesitated, turned away toward the kitchen.

Stella paused beside the range as he was working over the special curry sauce.

"What's the idea?" she asked.

"A special."

Her eyes studied his face. "How special?"

"*Very* special."

She walked out.

Larry Giffen ate the curried shrimp. He looked around the place with an air of proprietorship.

"Think maybe I'll go in business with you, Georgie."

George Ollie knew from the dryness in his mouth, the feeling

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of his knees, that that was what he had been expecting.

Larry jerked his head toward Stella. "She goes with the joint."

Ollie, suddenly angry and belligerent, took a step forward. "She doesn't go with anything."

Giffen laughed, turned on his heel, started toward the door, swung back, said, "I'll see you after closing tonight," and walked out.

It wasn't until the period of dead slack that Stella moved close to George.

"Want to tell me?" she asked.

He tried to look surprised. "What?"

"Nothing."

"I'm sorry, Stella. I can't."

"Why not?"

"He's dangerous."

"To whom?"

"To you—to both of us."

She made a gesture with her shoulder. "You never gain anything by running."

He pleaded with her. "Don't get tangled in it, Stella. You remember last night the police were out here for coffee and doughnuts after running around like mad—those two big jobs, the one on the safe in the bank, the other on the theater safe?"

She nodded.

"I should have known then," he told her. "That's Larry's technique. He never leaves them anything to work on. Rubber gloves so there are no fingerprints. Burglar alarms disconnected. Everything like clockwork. No clues. No wonder the police were nuts. Larry Giffen never leaves them a clue."

She studied him. "What's he got on *you?*"

George turned away, then faced her, tried to speak, and couldn't.

"Okay," she said, "I withdraw the question."

Two customers came in, Stella escorted them to a table and went on with the regular routine. She seemed calmly competent, completely unworried. George Ollie, on the other hand, couldn't get his thoughts together. His world had collapsed. Rubber-glove Giffen must have found out about that bank job with the green accomplice, otherwise he wouldn't have dropped in.

News travels fast in the underworld. Despite carefully cultivated changes in his personal appearance, some smart ex-con while eating at the restaurant must have "made" George Ollie. He had said nothing to George, but had reserved the news as an exclusive for the ears of Larry Giffen. The prison underworld knew Big Larry might have use for George—as a farmer might have use for a horse.

And now Larry had "dropped in."

Other customers arrived. The restaurant filled up. The rush-hour waitresses came on. For two and a half hours there was so much busi-

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ness that George had no chance to think. Then business began to slacken. By eleven o'clock it was down to a trickle. At midnight George closed up.

"Coming over?" Stella asked.

"Not tonight," George said. "I want to do a little figuring on a purchase list."

She said nothing and went out.

George locked the doors, put on the heavy double bolts, and yet, even as he turned out the lights and put the bars in place, he knew that bolts wouldn't protect him from what was coming.

Larry Giffen kicked on the door at 12:30.

George, in the shadows, pretended not to hear. He wondered what Larry would do if he found that George had ignored his threat, had gone away and left the place protected by locks and the law.

Larry Giffen knew better. He kicked violently on the door, then turned and banged it with his heel —banged it so hard that the glass rattled and threatened to break.

George hurried out of the shadows and opened the door.

"What's the idea of keeping me waiting, Georgie?" Larry asked with a solicitude that was overdone to the point of sarcasm. "Don't you want to be chummy with your old friend?"

George said, "Larry, I'm on the square. I'm on the legit. I'm staying that way."

Larry threw back his head and laughed. "You know what happens to rats, Georgie."

"I'm no rat, Larry. I'm going straight, that's all. I've paid my debts to the law and to you."

Larry showed big yellowed teeth as he grinned. "Ain't that nice, Georgie. *All* your debts paid! Now how about that National Bank job where Skinny got in a panic because the cashier didn't get 'em up fast enough?"

"I wasn't in on that, Larry."

Larry's grin was triumphant. "Says you! You were handling the getaway car. The cops got one fingerprint from the rear-view mirror. The F.B.I. couldn't classify that one print, but if anyone ever started 'em checking it with *your* file, Georgie, your fanny would be jerked off that cushioned stool by the cash register and transferred to the electric chair—the hot seat, Georgie . . . You never did like the hot seat, Georgie."

George Ollie licked dry lips. His forehead moistened with sweat. He wanted to say something but there was nothing he could say.

Larry went on talking. "I pulled a couple of jobs here. I'm going to pull just one more. Then I'm moving in with you, Georgie. I'm your new partner. You need a little protection. I'm giving it to you."

Larry swaggered over to the cash register, rang up No Sale, pulled the drawer open, raised the hood over the roll of paper to look at the day's receipts.

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"Now, Georgie," he said, regarding the empty cash drawer, "you shouldn't have put away all that dough. Where is it?"

George Ollie gathered all the reserves of his self-respect. "Go to hell," he said. "I've been on the square and I'm going to stay on the square."

Larry strode across toward him. His open left hand slammed against the side of George's face with staggering impact.

"You're hot," Larry said, and his right hand swung up to the other side of George's face. "You're hot, Georgie," and his left hand came up from his hip.

George made a pretense at defending himself but Larry Giffen, quick as a cat, strong as a bear, came after him. "You're hot." . . . Wham . . . "You're hot." . . . Wham . . . "You're hot, Georgie."

At length Larry stepped back. "I'm taking a half interest. You'll run it for me when I'm not here, Georgie. You'll keep accurate books. You'll do all the work. Half of the profits are mine. I'll come in once in a while to look things over. Be damn certain that you don't try any cheating, Georgie.

"You wouldn't like the hot squat, Georgie. You're fat, Georgie. You're well fed. You've teamed up with that swivel-hipped babe, Georgie. I could see it in your eye. She's class, and she goes with the place, Georgie. Remember, I'm cutting myself in for a half interest. I'm leaving it to you to see there isn't any trouble."

George Ollie's head was in a whirl. His cheeks were stinging from the heavy-handed slaps of the big man. His soul felt crushed under a weight. Larry Giffen knew no law but the law of power, and Larry Giffen, his little malevolent eyes glittering with sadistic gloating, was on the move, coming toward him again, hoping for an opportunity to beat up on him.

George hadn't known when Stella had let herself in. Her key had opened the door smoothly.

"What's he got on you, George?" she asked.

Larry Giffen swung to the sound of her voice. "Well, well, little Miss Swivel-hips," he said. "Come here, Swivel-hips. I'm half owner in the place now. Meet your new boss."

She stood still, looking from him to George Ollie.

Larry turned to George.

"All right, Georgie, where's the safe? Give me the combination to the safe, Georgie. As your new partner I'll need to have it. I'll handle the day's take. Later on you can keep books, but right now I need money. I have a heavy date tonight."

George Ollie hesitated a moment, then moved back toward the kitchen.

"I said give *me* the combination to the safe," Larry Giffen said, his voice cracking like a whip.

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Stella was looking at him. George had to make it a showdown. "The dough's back here," he said. He moved toward the rack where the big butcher knives were hanging.

Larry Giffen read his mind. Larry had always been able to read him like a book.

Larry's hand moved swiftly. A snub-nosed gun nestled in Larry's big hand.

There was murder in the man's eye but his voice remained silky and taunting.

"Now, Georgie, you must be a good boy. Don't act rough. Remember, Georgie, I've done my last time. No one takes Big Larry alive. Give me the combination to the safe, Georgie. And I don't want any fooling!"

George Ollie reached a decision. It was better to die fighting than to be strapped into an electric chair. He ignored the gun, kept moving back toward the knife rack.

Big Larry Giffen was puzzled for a moment. George had always collapsed like a flat tire when Larry had given an order. This was a new George Ollie. Larry couldn't afford to shoot. He didn't want noise and he didn't want to kill.

"Hold it, Georgie! You don't need to get rough." Larry put away his gun. "You're hot on that bank job, Georgie. Remember I can send you to the hot squat. That's all the argument I'm going to use, Georgie. You don't need to go for a shiv. Just tell me to walk out, Georgie, and I'll leave. Big Larry doesn't stay where he isn't welcome."

"But you'd better welcome me, Georgie boy. You'd better give me the combination to the safe. You'd better take me in as your new partner. Which is it going to be, Georgie?"

It was Stella who answered the question. Her voice was calm and clear. "Don't hurt him. You'll get the money."

Big Larry looked at her. His eyes changed expression. "Now that's the sort of a broad *I* like. Tell your new boss where the safe is. Start talking, babe, and remember you go with the place."

"There isn't any safe," George said hurriedly. "I banked the money."

Big Larry grinned. "You're a liar. You haven't left the place. I've been casing the joint. Go on, babe, tell me where the hell that safe is. Then Georgie here will give his new partner the combination."

"Concealed back of the sliding partition in the pie counter," Stella said.

"Well, well, well," Larry Giffen observed, "isn't *that* interesting?"

"Please don't hurt him," Stella pleaded. "The shelves lift out . . ."

"Stella!" George Ollie said sharply. "Shut up!"

"The damage has been done now, Georgie boy," Giffen said.

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He slid back the glass doors of the pie compartment, lifted out the shelves, put them on the top of the counter, then slid back the partition disclosing the safe door.

"Clever, Georgie boy, clever! You called on your experience, didn't you? And now the combination, Georgie."

Ollie said, "You can't get away with it, Larry. I won't . . ."

"Now, Georgie boy, don't talk that way. I'm your partner. I'm in here fifty-fifty with you. You do the work and run the place and I'll take my half from time to time.—But you've been holding out on me for a while, Georgie boy, so everything that's in the safe is part of my half. Come on with the combination.—Of course, I could make a spindle job on it, but since I'm a half owner in the joint I hate to damage any of the property. Then you'd have to buy a new safe. The cost of that would have to come out of your half. You couldn't expect *me* to pay for a new safe."

Rubber-glove Giffen laughed at his little joke.

"I said to hell with you," George Ollie said.

Larry Giffen's fist clenched. "I guess you need a damn good working over, Georgie boy. You shouldn't be disrespectful . . ."

Stella's voice cut in. "Leave him alone. I said you'd get the money. George doesn't want any electric chair."

Larry turned back to her. "I like 'em sensible, sweetheart. Later on, I'll tell you about it. Right now it's all business. Business before pleasure. Let's go."

"Ninety-seven four times to the right," Stella said.

"Well, well, well," Giffen observed. "She knows the combination. We both know what that means, Georgie boy, don't we?"

George, his face red and swollen from the impact of the slaps, stood helpless.

"It means she really is part of the place," Giffen said. "I've got a half interest in you too, girlie. I'm looking forward to collecting on that too. Now what's the rest of the combination?"

Giffen bent over the safe; then, suddenly thinking better of it, he straightened, slipped the snub-nosed revolver into his left hand, and said, "Just so you don't get ideas, Georgie boy—but you wouldn't, you know. You don't like the idea of the hot squat."

Stella, white-faced and tense, called out the numbers. Larry Giffen spun the dials on the safe, swung the door open, opened the cash box.

"Well, well, well," he said, sweeping the bills and money into his pocket. "It *was* a good day, wasn't it?"

Stella said, "There's a hundred-dollar bill in the ledger."

Big Larry pulled out the ledger. "So there is, so there is," he said,

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surveying the hundred-dollar bill with the slightly torn corner: "Girlie, you're a big help. I'm glad you go with the place. I think we're going to get along swell."

Larry straightened, backed away from the safe, stood looking at George Ollie.

"Don't look like that Georgie boy. It isn't so bad. I'll leave you enough profit to keep you in business and keep you interested in the work. I'll just take off most of the cream. I'll drop in to see you from time to time, and, of course, Georgie boy, you won't tell anybody that you've seen me. Even if you did it wouldn't do any good because I came out the front door, Georgie boy. I'm smart. I'm not like you. I don't have something hanging over me where someone can jerk the rug out from under me at any time.

"Well, Georgie boy, I've got to be toddling along. I've got a little job at the supermarket up the street. They put altogether too much confidence in that safe they have. But I'll be back in a couple of hours, Georgie boy. I've collected on part of my investment and now I want to collect on the rest of it. You wait up for me, girlie. You can go get some shut-eye, Georgie."

Big Larry looked at Stella, walked to the door, stood for a moment searching the shadows, then melted away into the darkness.

"You," Ollie said to Stella, his voice showing his heartsickness at her betrayal.

"What?" she asked.

"Telling him about the safe—about that hundred dollars, giving him the combination . . ."

She said, "I couldn't stand to have him hurt you."

"You and the things you can't stand," Ollie said. "You don't know Rubber-glove Giffen. You don't know what you're in for now. You don't . . ."

"Shut up," she interrupted. "If you're going to insist on letting other people do your thinking for you, I'm taking on the job."

He looked at her in surprise.

She walked over to the closet, came out with a wrecking bar. Before he had the faintest idea of what she had in mind she walked over to the cash register, swung the bar over her head, and brought it down with crashing impact on the front of the register. Then she inserted the point of the bar, pried back the chrome steel, jerked the drawer open. She went to the back door, unlocked it, stood on the outside, inserted the end of the wrecking bar, pried at the door until she had crunched the wood of the door jamb.

George Ollie was watching her in motionless stupefaction. "What the devil are you doing?" he asked. "Don't you realize . . . ?"

"Shut up," she said. "What's this you once told me about a spindle job? Oh, yes, you knock off the

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knob and punch out the spindle—"

She walked over to the safe and swung the wrecking bar down on the knob of the combination, knocking it out of its socket, letting it roll crazily along the floor. Then she went to the kitchen, picked out a towel, polished the wrecking bar clean of fingerprints.

"Let's go," she said to George Ollie.

"Where?" he asked.

"To Yuma," she said. "We eloped an hour and a half ago—or hadn't you heard? We're getting married. There's no delay or red tape in Arizona. As soon as we cross the state line we're free to get spliced. You need someone to do your thinking for you. I'm taking the job.

"And," she went on, as George Ollie stood there, "in this state a husband can't testify against his wife, and a wife can't testify against her husband. In view of what I know now it might be just as well."

George stood looking at her, seeing something he had never seen before—a fierce, possessive something that frightened him at the same time it reassured him. She was like a panther protecting her young.

"But I don't get it," George said. "What's the idea of wrecking the place, Stella?"

"Wait until you see the papers," she told him.

"I still don't get it," he told her.

"You will," she said.

George stood for another moment. Then he walked toward her. Strangely enough he wasn't thinking of the trap but of the smooth contours under her pale blue uniform. He thought of Yuma, of marriage and of security, of a home.

It wasn't until two days later that the local newspapers were available in Yuma. There were headlines on an inside page:

RESTAURANT BURGLARIZED WHILE PROPRIETOR ON HONEYMOON

BIG LARRY GIFFEN KILLED IN GUN BATTLE WITH OFFICERS

The newspaper account went on to state that Mrs. George Ollie had telephoned the society editor from Yuma stating that George Ollie and she had left the night before and had been married in the Gretna Green across the state line. The society editor had asked her to hold the phone and had the call switched to the police.

Police asked to have George Ollie put on the line. They had a surprise for him. It seemed that when the merchant patrolman had made his regular nightly check of Ollie's restaurant at one A.M., he found it had been broken into. Police had found a perfect set of fingerprints on the cash register and on the safe. Fast work had served to identify the fingerprints as those

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of Big Larry Giffen, known in the underworld as Rubber-glove Giffen because of his skill in wearing rubber gloves and never leaving fingerprints. This was one job that Big Larry had messed up. Evidently he had forgotten his gloves.

Police had mug shots of Big Larry and in no time at all they had out a general alarm.

Only that afternoon George Ollie's head waitress and part-time cashier had gone to the head of the police burglary detail. "In case we should ever be robbed," she had said, "I'd like to have it so you could get a conviction when you get the man who did the job. I left a hundred-dollar bill in the safe. I've torn off a corner. Here's the torn corner. You keep it. That will enable you to get a conviction if you get the thief."

Police thought it was a fine idea. It was such a clever idea they were sorry they couldn't have used it to pin a conviction on Larry Giffen.

But Larry had elected to shoot it out with the arresting officers. Knowing his record, officers had been prepared for this. After the sawed-off shotguns had blasted the life out of Big Larry the police had found the bloodstained hundred-dollar bill in his pocket when his body was stripped at the morgue.

Police also found the loot from three other local jobs on him, cash amounting to some $7000.

Police were still puzzled as to how it happened that Giffen, known to the underworld as the most artistic box man in the business, had done such an amateurish job at the restaurant. Giffen's reputation was that he had never left a fingerprint or a clue.

Upon being advised that his place had been broken into, George Ollie, popular restaurant owner, had responded in a way which was perfectly typical of honeymooners the world over.

"The hell with business," he had told the police. "I'm on my honeymoon."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CYRIL HARE**

TITLE: ***The Homing Wasp***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Do you know how to find a wasp's nest? . . . And surely what is true of wasps should be true of larger pests . . .*

THE DETECTIVE INSPECTOR AND the county pathologist were at the mortuary.

"It's a rum business," said the Inspector. "This fellow was a blackmailer all right. We'd suspected him for some time. but nobody would talk. It's the old story. He drives one of his victims a bit too hard, and this is the result. But what I can't understand . . ."

Sybil Mainwaring, verging on middle age, but still handsome in a rather hard style of good looks, held her head high in the society that centered round the county town of Markhampton. She was well off, well connected, married to a leader in local circles, herself prominent in the affairs of the neighborhood, a pillar of respectability. Michael Jay was employed in Mainwaring's office in Markhampton. He was at least fifteen years her junior, vulgar, uneducated, and penniless.

Sybil had met him at a staff party and had fallen in love with him at first sight. She knew him to be in every respect hopelessly inferior to herself, but with her eyes wide open she had continued to love him, passionately and unreasonably, but—as she fondly imagined—secretly.

It was an incredible folly for a woman in her position to commit. Nobody who knew her would have believed that she would ever put herself in a position where she could be blackmailed. But anybody who knew her really well—and there were remarkably few who did—could have foretold that to hope to blackmail Sybil Mainwaring

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with impunity was an even greater act of folly.

The unsigned, typewritten letter was explicit in its terms. She was to leave fifty pounds in banknotes at a given spot by the roadside near her house between the hours of nine and ten o'clock that evening. The alternative was the exposure to her husband "and all others whom it might concern" of what the writer knew of her affair with Michael Jay. Further details followed that proved beyond doubt that what the writer knew of the affair was both extensive and accurate.

Sybil burned the letter and ground the ashes to powder. Then she went out into the garden to think things over. At first she found it hard to believe that what had occurred was really true.

They had been so careful! Except for the half-witted old man who kept the garage where she left her car when she went to meet Michael, nobody had so much as seen them together.

She went over in her mind all the precautions they had taken and could find no flaw. It was impossible that anything should have leaked out, and yet the impossible had happened. She, Sybil Mainwaring, was faced with a ruinous scandal unless she complied with a demand which, common sense told her, would only be repeated again in the due course. By turns, she felt frightened, humiliated, and angry.

Anger was uppermost in her mind as she paced the lawn, but it was a cold, calculating anger. Now that the first shock was over, she took stock of the position with ruthless calm. Of one thing she was determined: that the unknown who had threatened her should pay for his presumption.

She would not to go the police. A woman of her standing could not afford to do so. Nor would she consult Michael—instinctively she felt that he would be useless in an affair of this sort. This was her business and she would deal with it herself—exactly how, she could not yet determine.

A wasp settled on the grass in front of her and she crushed it under foot. If only she could destroy her unseen torturer as easily!

That evening she took an envelope containing fifty pounds and placed it between the roots of an oak tree bordering the lane outside her house. Having done so, she concealed herself in the entrance to the drive and set herself to watch. Her husband was away and she need account to no one for her movements.

A few minutes after ten, a motorcycle came down the lane and stopped opposite the oak. The tail light was too dim for her to read the license place, and the rider was no more than a blurred shape in mackintosh and goggles.

The rider dismounted, apparently to make some adjustment to

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his seat, and in doing so, looked cautiously in both directions. Then in a quick movement he scooped the envelope from its resting place, remounted, and rode swiftly off to the main road. Sybil saw the headlight of the machine swing left in the direction of the town.

So that's how it's done, she thought, as she went back into the house. So simple, and yet so efficient! She was fifty pounds poorer and no nearer to finding out who the blackmailer was and where he came from. And when the performance was repeated—as it surely would be—she would be no nearer still.

It was while she was undressing for bed that she remembered the wasp in the garden and an idea came to her. As a child she had been told by an old gardener how to find a wasps' nest. All you had to do, he said, was to watch a homing wasp as far as you could see it. Then go the place where it passed from your view and wait for the next wasp flying in the same direction. Follow that to the limits of your vision and wait for the next one. Sooner or later, you will find yourself at the nest. What was true of wasps should be true of larger, fouler pests.

Sybil went to sleep feeling that perhaps she had not wasted fifty pounds after all.

The next demand arrived a fortnight later. Again it was for fifty pounds. Again she placed the money in the tree roots in the lane. But this time she waited in a car at the junction of the lane with the main road.

At five minutes past ten a motorcycle swung out of the lane and roared off toward Markhampton. Following, she was able to keep it in view right into the main street of the town. She lost sight of it finally when it turned the corner past the church. By the time she had reached that point it had vanished into one of a number of side streets which intersected the main thoroughfare.

So far, so good. She had had a good view of the cycle in the street lights and would know it again. Next time—or the time after, it mattered not—she would track the wasp to its nest.

The excitement of the chase strong upon her, she waited with positive impatience for the next anonymous letter, and when it came she left the money in the lane as cheerfully as an angler baiting a hook. By the time the money had been taken from its hiding place she was already in position at the church corner. The hunter had become the hunted.

It cost Mrs. Mainwaring in all five installments of fifty pounds each to establish exactly where her money was being taken. The chase led her eventually to a small block of buildings in the business quarter of the town. A little simple research satisfied her that it consisted

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entirely of offices which were normally deserted at night.

When the sixth summons came, she did not got to the expense of leaving money in the lane. Instead, she left an envelope stuffed with paper, and drove straight into the town.

As the climax approached, Sybil felt positively exhilarated. Michael had been moody and depressed that afternoon, but she had rallied him by the sheer force of her lightheartedness. She was about to put an end to the creature that menaced her existence and the thought gave her a savage joy. The fact that Michael would never even know the peril in which they had stood added a keen edge to her pleasure.

At half-past ten she parked her car in a side street near her destination and walked the rest of the way. Her bag was in her hand, and in the bag was the automatic pistol which she had taken from her husband's desk.

In the yard of the office block she saw a familiar motor-cycle. One window, on an upper floor, was illuminated. The side entrance of the building was ajar.

Quietly she pushed the door open and tiptoed up the dark stairs. A faint bar of light shone beneath the door of a room near the second landing. She pulled the pistol from her bag and walked straight in.

It was a small room with a large desk in it. Seated at the farther side of the desk was a man, his head bent low over a pile of papers. He looked up at the sound of her entrance. She found herself staring into the astonished face of Michael Jay.

She had known it all along.

At the back of her mind she had always been sure that only one person in the world could know the truth about her and Michael, and that was Michael himself.

But she had not believed it. She had refused to believe that he could be so base as to take her favors and turn them into hard cash, because against all sense and reason she had loved him, worthless though she knew him to be.

Now with the proof before her eyes she did not hesitate. The bullet took Michael squarely in the heart, and he fell backward in his chair without a cry, the look of astonishment still on his handsome young face . . .

"But what I can't understand," the Detective Inspector was saying, "is *this*."

"This" was a body, neatly laid out upon the mortuary slab.

"I don't follow," said the pathologist. "Isn't this the blackmailer you were talking about?"

"Lord, no. This is a young chap called Jay. His only trouble was that he was too fond of the women. Here's the blackmailer next to him. Old Wickfield. He kept a garage just outside the town as a blind,

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and passed for simple-minded which he wasn't, by any manner of means. We found him in the back room of his office with his head stove in. Jay had one of Wickfield's demand notes in his pocket, so that seems easily explained. But if so, what was Jay doing in the front room of the same office with a bullet through *him?* Can you answer that one, Doctor?"

"You answer your own questions," said the pathologist. "I have troubles enough of my own. When I've finished with this pair I've got to go out to do the post mortem on Mrs. Mainwaring. They fished her car out of the river this morning with her inside it. Funny thing for a sensible woman like that to do, wasn't it? It just shows, you never can tell with women drivers."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **NICHOLAS DIMINNO**

TITLE: ***The Case of "Wall Street 1929"***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: The Lieutenant

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The Lieutenant was the first one to admit that he knew nothing about art—but he knew what he liked; and it was strange how much that meant in a murder case . . .*

THE LIEUTENANT HAD NOTHING against modern art. If people wanted to paint a white line on a white background, call it *White on White* and sell it, that was their business. If they took some coils of copper and wound it around an armature and called it *Frustration,* that likewise was their business. But they mustn't expect him to understand it, he thought as he sat in the anteroom of the Howell Galleries. Around him were paintings, strange things in bright hues, and sculptures, stranger still, in wood, clay, and what looked like chicken wire.

He checked his notes. They were scanty. Garrett Grimes had been murdered in his studio, stabbed with his own palette knife. The medical examiner's report mentioned traces of paint in the wound, and its length and depth suggested the knife. Which was missing.

Garrett Grimes had been having a drink, alone—that was obviously what the murderer would have one believe. But while there was but one glass, Grimes's, on the table, there was the telltale circle of another on the opposite side. The murderer had taken his glass away, either fearful of fingerprints, or more likely, to insure that the police would not think this a friendly chat and narrow the circle to Grimes's friends, of which the murderer may have been one.

The way it looked now, it might

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have been a robberty attempt; if nothing was actually stolen it was because there was nothing to steal. True, paintings still hung on the walls, but they were massive things and it would take a Samson to carry them off. The Lieutenant had rather liked them. They were his style. Landscapes, seascapes, portraits of people who looked like people . . .

A woman with silver-white hair entered. Gladys Howell.

"Forgive me, Lieutenant. I'd have come much sooner but one of my most precious things is fading, *fading,* would you believe it? I'm absolutely frantic."

She swept off down the corridor and the Lieutenant followed along behind.

"It's been a horrible day, horrible. First the news about Garrett, and then this. It's defeating, cruelly defeating. I'll not come up with a single idea today!"

They were seated now in her private office, a quiet room with gray walls. Behind Miss Howell was a large painting, predominantly purple, that might have been anything. But the placard under it said, *Wall Street 1929*. Well, maybe.

"You have any idea who might have murdered Garrett Grimes?" he asked.

"Everybody," she said dolefully.

That was a good beginning.

"How do you mean?"

She jumped up and began to roam about the room, massaging her temples. "Garrett was very individualistic, and while that's a marvelous trait, absolutely essential in an artist, he tended to carry it to extremes. Had no sense of balance. Anyway, while there were any number of people who loved him, there were an equal number who hated him. And the same people, don't you see? Am I making sense?"

"I think so," he said, and wondered.

"It all depended on your last encounter with Garrett. He could be witty, charming, or he could be a louse supreme. I saw him as a tragic figure myself—tragic."

She sank in the chair again and lit a cigarette, obviously waiting for the Lieutenant to ask about the tragedy. He did.

"Garrett," she said, blowing a plume of smoke toward the ceiling, "developed certain misconceptions early in life and was too stubborn to change them. For that reason he was a failure."

"But I thought he won some kind of award—"

"The last week of his life," nodded Miss Howell. "After twenty-six years of groping and blundering and stubbornness. I'd hardly say he was a success. You've seen his studio."

"You mean his pictures?"

"Exactly. The rolling hills, cows, windmills. The tired old clichés that have been worked to death." Miss Howell blew a despairing

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plume of smoke. "I told him to get away from them. I told him Rembrandt had *done* all that, there was nothing left to *say* in that area. I tried to get him to look into himself, to search his heart and see what he found there, and to put that and only that on canvas. Well, I succeeded, but I didn't know it was to be the last thing he ever painted."

"The one that got the award?"

She nodded. "Into it he poured everything I knew he had, everything that was the *real* Garrett. Everyone loved it immediately. Just as everyone thought what a tragic waste that he'd denied himself all these years, out of stupid pride and stubbornness. But through that one painting, Lieutenant, Garrett Grimes will live."

She turned dramatically to face the purple canvas. The Lieutenant blinked.

"Is that it?"

"Masterly, isn't it? All his years of cynicism and observation and compassion are in it. And what a theme! *Wall Street 1929*. Look there on the right, can't you just see the banker jumping off the building?"

The Lieutenant looked but all he saw was what seemed to be a purple meteor.

"It's so different from the stuff in his studio," he said cautiously.

"Of *course* it's different," she said crisply. "Until I got him to do this he was working in a sterile medium and getting nowhere. I talked to him one night, jolted him out of his stubbornness. I told him that for sixteen years he'd been sending entries to the Parthenon Art Competition and for sixteen years his stuff had been rejected. Did he want that for the rest of his life? To be rejected, to be a failure? Garrett agreed to try, to search himself, to be personal in his approach—and *Wall Street* was the result. His first attempt—a blockbuster! If only he'd done it years ago! Today he'd be one of the giants."

A cloud crossed her face and she took a moody puff at the cigarette. The Lieutenant wondered when she'd show even a small sign of sorrow over the artist's death.

"And he won this Parthenon with that?" he said, trying to keep the disbelief out of his voice.

"First prize. Uanimously. Raves from everyone."

He wondered who everyone was. No one he'd ever heard of, he was certain of that.

"A money award?"

"One thousand dollars."

"Had he received it?"

"No, there were to be ceremonies next month. He was to get it then."

"So everybody hated Garrett," he said, standing up.

"In a way. They loved him too."

This was going to be a pip.

"I do hope you find Garrett's murderer, Lieutenant. He destroyed a career that might have

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been one of the great ones and I'd like to strangle him—the murderer, I mean. That *Wall Street* now." She whirled back to the stormy purple painting. "Garrett did it in one night. One night! Right after we'd had our talk. He'd have made both of us rich if he'd lived. That's why I want so much for you to find his murderer."

Touching, thought the Lieutenant.

"Besides. of course, the fact that he was a dear friend of mine. When I didn't loathe him, that is."

It was a good thing he hadn't tried to write any of this down. If anyone read it over later, he'd think the Lieutenant had been drunk.

"Miss Howell, could you give me the names of personal friends of Grimes? Both in art and out of it. I noticed some portraits in his studio. If I could find out who posed for them . . ."

In a weary tone she supplied the information she had, let him take a few names from her address book, and bade him again to find Garrett's murderer. The Lieutenant acquiesced, feeling like a schoolboy who'd been told to do his homework.

He clacked his way down the corridor, down an aisle of curved pipes that said *Nude* and canvases that depicted what looked to him like fried eggs, and breathed the fresh air as he came out on the street. It was a ritzy location, all right; there must be more to modern art than met the eye.

Rooney, his driver, was lounging near the car. It was a good thing he hadn't brought Rooney in; his eyes would have bugged and Miss Howell would have thought the police weren't too bright.

They got in the car and the Lieutenant gave him the first address. As they drove, Rooney said he wouldn't mind having one of the paintings of the late Garrett Grimes —especially that one called *Boats at Anchor*. He kind of went for that. He had just the spot for it in his living room too.

"That shows how much you know," said the Lieutenant. "When he did that he was blundering, hadn't found himself, wasn't getting personal enough."

"Huh?" said Rooney.

"It's a cliché," explained the Lieutenant. "You should've seen him at his best. I just did. Piece called *Wall Street 1929*."

"I still like the *Boats*," said Rooney. "And that one of the girl. You know, with the slanty eyes."

"You mean the nude?"

"Yeah. If there's an auction of this guy's stuff I'd like to know."

"Your wife would never let you keep it, Rooney."

Rooney became depressed. "No, I guess not. But she was all right. You think there's a real girl looks like that?"

"That's where we're going now."

"Yeah?" Rooney sat up.

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"Don't get in an uproar. This is business and you'll stay outside."

"All I want to see is how close she looks to the picture."

"I'll find out for both of us."

The Lieutenant watched the streets roll by and wondered where he was in this investigation. Not exactly no place, but on the other hand not far from it. Here he had the homicide of a man everybody loved and hated. He'd been knocking himself out doing pictures that were pretty good, as far as the Lieutenant was concerned, but nobody tumbled to them—at least, not this Howell dame or these Parthenon judges. So Grimes turns around and knocks together this *Wall Street* that's so unlike him, so different from the seascapes and landscapes a man could recognize. Well, maybe the guy decided to jump on the bandwagon. He was tired of starving—that was only human. But that purple job just wasn't his . . . his . . . what was the word? Idiom, that was it. *Wall Street* wasn't his idiom.

Rooney drove into a narrow little alley and stopped at number 44. As he got out and looked it over, a shabby place with ashcans outside, he knew Rooney was eyeing him reproachfully, wanting to come along.

When he rang the bell under the name of Mildred Preston, nothing happened. He rang again, and again, and after what seemed a long time in the dark, dank hallway a door was flung open upstairs and a voice sang out, "Come up, come up, already!"

He began to climb, thinking that he might get some straight answers from Milly. Her first words had sounded promising. He climbed and climbed and began to puff. Why did these Bohemians insist on living so high up? Oh, yes, the light—they had to have light.

On the top floor, the roof really, a door was open and he went in. There were beaded curtains he thought had gone out with Dr. Fu Manchu, and parting them, he came into a room that might have been a Hong Kong opium den. The walls were black, the furniture bright red, and incense was burning. The girl in black sweater and green slacks had to be Milly. Same eyes, same chin, same flowing hair as in Grimes's portrait. She just looked a bit smaller in the slacks and sweater. And more rumpled.

"Sit down, if you're somebody," said Milly with a wave of her hand. He noticed now that she was painting; it looked like a cucumber in an early stage of its development.

"I'm from the police," he said.

"About Grimes. I expected you." Calmly she went on painting; he wanted to ask what it was supposed to be but it might hurt her feelings. Milly was quite a girl. If he wasn't happily married, he'd like to study painting with her. Then he shook himself: he was getting as bad as Rooney.

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"I think it's the most pathetic thing I ever heard." Milly dabbed at the canvas. "After struggling all his life and then having this simply tremendous inspiration—poof! He dies."

"He was murdered."

Milly turned to look at him, her green eyes flickering. "Was he? I'm sorry. Even though I caught pneumonia at his place because he was too cheap to turn on the heater." She added a few knobs to the cucumber—or whatever it was. "But isn't it so typical of the senselessness of life? Working on all that drivel for years and years and then, suddenly, he wakes up and before he has a chance to make a name for himself or even some money, this happens."

He didn't think it was such drivel, he wanted to say. That picture of her, for instance. He'd liked that.

"Why did he suddenly start painting that new way?" he asked.

"He woke up, already."

"But why?"

"Because he'd gotten nowhere, couldn't sell his stuff, couldn't even give it away."

"*I* found it all right."

Milly grimaced. "All right—everybody's all right! You need more reason to go on painting than *that!* If I thought I was just all right," she said fiercely, "I'd drop this in a minute and be a waitress or something."

"You paint yourself?"

"Can't you *see?*" She gave a high shrill laugh. "What a detective!"

The Lieutenant thought he'd like to take her over his knee. She should be in the suburbs with three kids instead of here, among the black walls and the incense.

He tried to find out who Grimes's enemies were. It seemed that any number of people might have been angry with Garrett Grimes, who had a peculiar sense of humor. She could think of about thirty offhand.

The Lieutenant looked at the cucumber glumly. He could see his men, on the order of Rooney, questioning some of these artist types. It would be funny, if this wasn't murder.

"Was Grimes married, or in love or something?"

"Married, no. In love, yes. With himself. A passionate affair."

He got out his notebook and Milly, between daubs at the cucumber, gave him the names of more people to see. Hartley Brace, especially—he had been Grimes's artistic conscience. A brilliant man. She'd love to meet someone like Hartley Brace sometime. She'd drop her boy friend so fast . . .

As the Lieutenant clattered down the rickety stairs, he wondered why they hadn't demolished this building. It was the oldest he'd come across; it took an artist to live here. Poor people wouldn't stand for it.

Rooney's face was a question as he got into the car.

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"Looks like she just got out of bed," said the Lieutenant. "Bet she looks that way all day long."

"How was she dressed?"

"Quite properly. Get going."

Hartley Brace lived in a brownstone on the East Side. The place was immaculately tended outside, with evergreen shrubs and a painted filigree fence.

The Lieutenant pressed a button that sounded chimes somewhere and waited. A Japanese houseman came, bowed him into a small room, and went to get Mr. Brace. The room was studded with bric-a-brac, paintings, and tapestries. Near the door an orange water color burned like a small fireball.

Mr. Hartley Brace entered. Tall, slim, and elegant, he looked like one of those ads in the stylish magazines. Compared to him, impeccable and faultless from the top of his brushed hair to his gleaming oxfords, the Lieutenant felt as if he'd just come in from the fields.

"Miss Howell said you knew Garrett Grimes," the Lieutenant began, showing his credentials.

"Yes. Quite unfortunate," said Brace.

"Exactly how well did you know him? I understand you were his artistic conscience, sort of."

Brace wrinkled his nose. "I hate that phrase. I'm merely a critic. Certainly I've known him for years and we've discussed art on scores of occasions, but as for being his conscience . . ."

He sat down indolently and the Lieutenant sat opposite him. This Brace was a cool one. A man he'd known for years had been murdered and he seemed unhappy to have been disturbed in whatever he was doing. Transplanting geraniums, maybe.

"Were any artists jealous of Grimes? Or angry at him?"

Brace smiled politely. "I wouldn't know. Grimes was just one of the hundreds of artists I've met and talked to in the past few years. You mustn't expect me to be too detailed in my answers."

The Lieutenant grunted. Why had he been given Brace's name in the first place? Then he remembered.

"You were head of the committee that chose *Wall Street* for that award—what was it?"

"The Parthenon."

"You thought the work was worthy of the award?"

"Obviously, or I'd not have recommended it."

Brace was looking at him curiously and the Lieutenant felt like a fool.

"You'll pardon me, Mr. Brace, but I'm kind of feeling my way. I'm not very familiar with art."

Brace bowed his head tolerantly. A real cold-blooded fish.

"Will you tell me why Grimes started painting that new way? After all those years of doing the other sort of thing?"

"I can't look into a person's mind,

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Lieutenant. Evidently he felt a certain dissatisfaction with his old work. Had any number of compulsive reasons for it. No success of any kind. Tired approach in a tired medium. He realized he'd have to change."

"You ever advise him to change?"

"Never."

"But you had discussions. About what?"

"He was an unfailing entrant in our annual competition, and unfailingly we had to reject his work. It was respectable stuff, but not exciting. He felt hurt about it, and I'd always explain our reasons. He didn't find them convincing."

"But later, I suppose, he came to agree. I mean, he changed his style."

"So it seemed."

The Lieutenant looked down at his notebook. He hadn't added a line. What now?

"How did you feel about him personally?"

"I did not have time to think about him personally," said Brace steadily. "I have a very full schedule—articles, radio, television. I knew the man, but if I involved myself in the successes and failures of every artist I've known . . ." He threw up his hands and gave a short laugh.

"You know of any enemies he might have had?"

"No, I didn't know him well enough for that. I don't doubt he had a few. He was a stubborn and opinionated man."

"That *Wall Street*," the Lieutenant groped. "I don't understand it, frankly."

"What was there to understand," said Brace stiffly. "Despair, confusion, turmoil, chaos, insecurity."

"Was there a banker jumping off a roof?"

"If you imagine a banker there was a banker."

The Lieutenant got up slowly, stuffing his notebook in his pocket. "You think Grimes's murderer belonged to the art world, Mr. Brace?"

"No," said Brace. "They're much too selfish to risk their skins for a third-rate painter."

"Third-rate? But he won your award."

"That was at the end. Until then he'd been third-rate."

"Still it's a shame he won't be here for the presentation."

"Eh? Oh, the Parthenon. He *won't* be here, will he?"

The Japanese houseman appeared from nowhere and led the Lieutenant to the filigree gate. He got into the car and stared down at his hands. Rooney looked at him.

"Where to, Lieutenant?"

He shook his head. He wanted to make some sense of his impressions of Hartley Brace, but the man was hard to figure. He hadn't shown much enthusiasm for Grimes, and that was strange, after awarding him a first prize.

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"Back to Grimes's place," he told Rooney.

In the studio the Lieutenant strolled from one end to the other, his shoes echoing on the wooden floor. In one corner was a bear rug, in another a leopard skin, in the center an easel, and above, a skylight—all that Grimes had needed to live. He'd probably slept on the rug, with the leopard skin for guests. And there was a sink for dinners and parties.

On the walls the landscapes and portraits glowed in the noon light. The one of Milly he liked especially: it made her look mysterious and haunting. What a difference from the screwball he'd been to see an hour ago!

He sat down on the window sill. Grimes had had a visitor last night, someone he knew. They'd had drinks and got into an argument. The visitor had stabbed Grimes, then carried off his glass. The wet circle on the table, the second one, had been made about the time Grimes died. Whoever had done it, then, didn't want to be known as one of Grimes's circle.

The superintendent downstairs was deaf, and while his eyes were excellent, he'd been watching television until two in the morning. He had seen no one and heard nothing. Besides, he minded his own business. He mentioned the models and seemed to think that the last thing Grimes had them up for was to model. But the superintendent minded his own business.

The Lieutenant rose and went to the easel. For twenty years Garrett Grimes had faced this easel and tried to work out his destiny—and failed. Until he saw the light and began to work in the new idiom. Too bad he hadn't lived to do more in the new idiom, though the last thing the world needed, thought the Lieutenant, was another job like *Wall Street 1929*.

The floor around the easel was spotted with paint—greens and reds and blues, some the color of the landscapes on the walls, some the color of Milly. A pattern caught his eye—at least, it seemed to be a pattern. It started at the foot of the easel and went out in a straight line for about five feet.

The Lieutenant got down on his haunches. There were dots, a great number of tiny dots, in a line that might almost have been made by a ruler.

He bent his head closer. Purple. About the same color as the background in *Wall Street*.

He looked for other lines of dots in other colors, but there were none—only splotches and splashes here and there.

What did it mean? Had Grimes tipped his palette as he approached the easel, allowing the paint to spill? If he had, would it have formed such a straight, precise line? Each dot was just like the other—a pinpoint really—and you

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had to look hard to see it among all the splashes of red and green and blue.

But they were there, on top of the other colors; and there was no doubt they had been made most recently.

He would need some advice on this. The one to consult was Hartley Brace, but he wasn't keen to see that cold-blooded man again. He'd try Milly. She thought he was a square but he felt comfortable with her. And his questions were elementary ones, maybe childish. Yes, Milly was the girl to have up here.

He clumped downstairs and told Rooney to get the girl and bring her back. Then he went down the block and into a drug store. He got the medical examiner on the phone; it was one of the medical examiner's jolly days and the Lieutenant listened patiently for a moment. Then he cut in.

"Doc, the paint that was in the wound. What color was it?"

"Purple."

"What shade of purple?"

"Are there shades? Search me."

"Was it a blackish purple?"

"I guess you'd call it that, yes."

He hung up and went upstairs again. It was a long climb and as he puffed past the third floor he told himself he should get to the "Y" more often. The rowing machine, that's what he needed, and a few laps around the track. He'd look into it sometime.

He was nosing through the tools and implements of Grimes's profession, the brushes and paints and canvases, when Milly sauntered in. Rooney followed, and from the look on his face the Lieutenant knew the last thing he was thinking about was the murder. Milly was attired in black: black sweater, black slacks, and black kerchief. He supposed that was a protest against something.

Rooney's glance kept going to the picture on the wall where she lolled, buxom and pink, on the leopard skin. Briefly the Lieutenant ordered him to take up his post downstairs.

"Milly, when you have paints in your palette, do they spill over as a rule?"

"Now and then, yes."

"Is there any particular pattern?"

Milly looked puzzled.

He led her to the easel and pointed to the floor. "You see that line of purple dots?"

"What about it?"

"How did that happen?"

"I'm not an expert on spilled paint, Lieutenant."

"Well, I'll tell you, Milly," he said. "If I took a stick and dipped it in water and did this"—he flicked his wrist sharply—"the water would drop off something like that."

"Very interesting, whatever it means." Milly shrugged.

"Get me a palette knife, will you? And then try to mix up a color like this."

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"The purple?" Milly was dubious. "I work in optimistic tones myself. You know, whites and pale greens and yellows."

"Be pessimistic just this once," he encouraged.

"I'm sure I don't know what on earth . . ." Her voice trailed off as she flip-flapped around the floor on her loose sandals, opening boxes and muttering to herself. The Lieutenant wondered if his idea would flop. It was a good thing the precise Hartley Brace wouldn't be here to see it. Or Rooney for that matter. As for Milly, it would be just one more bit of evidence what a strange person a detective was. She'd go back to her cucumber and forget all about it. And he might very much want to forget all about it himself.

Milly came back with the palette; in one of the wells was a pulpy mass of purple.

"It's not exactly the same shade," she apologized, "but close enough."

"Close enough." He took the palette. "Now the knife, Milly."

She handed him the knife.

"And will you put a new canvas on the easel, please?"

With a sigh of unutterable boredom Milly attached a canvas to the easel.

"Stand back," said the Lieutenant.

He dug the knife into the purple blob, held up his arm, then brought it down sharply with a jerk of the wrist. The paint flew at the canvas and landed with a splash.

"All my preparations for *that* . . ." Milly said, until she saw him on his haunches, peering intently at the floor.

"See?" He was tracing something with his finger. "The same kind of line. The same line, Milly!"

"What of it?" she said.

"Our Mr. Grimes did this before." He rose and dug the knife into the paint. "Stand back. I'm going to really let it fly this time!"

Milly retreated, thoroughly confused, and watched in wonder as the paint whirled through the air to land with splash, plop, splash, on the canvas.

"Look," the Lieutenant said. "Look!"

She looked. There on the canvas something was taking shape. It was familiar somehow. Where had she seen it before?

"It looks like," she said, "it looks like . . ."

"*Wall Street 1929*," said the Lieutenant, flinging another wad of paint. "Of course it hasn't got quite the chaos and insecurity and I don't see the banker anywhere, but I guess on different days you get different results. That's the beauty of the thing."

Milly's mouth was open. "But what does it *mean?*"

"It means that this is the technique Grimes used to win the Parthenon award. You said he had a strange sense of humor and well, there's your proof."

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"I don't believe it," cried Milly. "What he did he did from design, deliberation. If it looked haphazard, that was the great art of it."

"He stood five feet away from the canvas and he just flipped," said the Lieutenant. "After the awards committee had rejected him for sixteen years, he decided to see how much they knew about art."

Milly went over to sit on the window sill. "Impossible," she wailed. "Impossible!"

Poor girl. Her world was tottering.

"It ruins *everything* I believed in. If you—a cop of all people!—can come in and throw paint at a canvas and produce something that could win an award . . ."

"Forget it, Milly," he said.

She rose. "If you'll excuse me. I've got to go home and reconsider all my values. From the beginning."

"Don't do anything drastic," he joked.

She came to stand by the easel a long minute, her lips trembling. "It's better than anything I've done," she murmured. "Much better."

"I was just getting the flip of the wrist down pat the last few times," the Lieutenant said modestly.

Milly groaned and made for the door.

Boris Eliscu had a place near the river. He had worked with Grimes on a WPA project in the old days and had known him as a fellow artist and friend for over thirty years. Eliscu was a squarely built man with horn-rimmed glasses, and his studio was filled with stone. He'd turned to sculpture in the Forties, he explained. More inner satisfaction.

Patiently the Lieutenant went over the old ground with him and waited for something new. What he'd discovered about Grimes's new method he would keep to himself, until he knew more about Eliscu.

"Grimes was a disappointment," said Eliscu with a slight accent. "Him I never expected to sell out. That last thing of his, what was it?"

"Wall Street 1929."

Eliscu made a face. "You see, I wish to forget it. I prefer to remember Grimes as he was twenty years ago, ten years ago, last month!"

"You had no inkling he was going to change his style?"

"None. I was sure he believed in what he was doing. Or so he said—in our conversations, in the letters he wrote from Mexico, Canada, Spain." Eliscu sighed. "But he sold out like the others."

"You think he changed his style specifically to please the jury of that competition?"

"Of course! My own stuff has gotten nowhere there, either. Nowhere. I've argued with Brace a hundred times, a thousand times. But *I'll* never change," he vowed.

"Grimes argued with him too?"

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"Hundreds of times. I suppose he got tired of arguing, and starving, and began to see it Brace's way." Eliscu shook his head. "I can't really blame Grimes. I have a means of support, you see. Monuments."

"Yes," said the Lieutenant, who had spied an orthodox angel in the corner. "Brace was just one of the awards committee, wasn't he?"

"There were two others, but Brace was the only permanent member. He was the Pooh-Bah. His word carried the day." Eliscu muttered something in his turtleneck sweater that might have been a curse.

"Those letters you spoke of? You still have them?"

After much mumbling and sifting through closets the sculptor produced a folder. He blew a cloud of dust from it and began to peel out letters with his square fingers.

The Lieutenant took a few of the faded bits of paper to the window. What he could make out of them —the script was cramped and hard to read—was one long vow not to betray one's art, to paint life as one saw it and the devil with anyone else.

"Could I borrow these?" he said.

"You can have them," Eliscu said gloomily. "After seeing how he contradicted himself with that . . . that thing at the Howell, I don't want to keep them any more."

He shoved more letters at the Lieutenant, who shuffled them together and stuffed them into a pocket.

"I understand Grimes had a strange sense of humor."

"He did wild things. But not lately. Lately he seemed depressed."

Eliscu was looking depressed, too, staring at a block of stone as the Lieutenant left. He had Rooney drive him to the station, where he went around to the forgery unit. He had a hard time explaining what he wanted, and a harder time composing it, but at last the man said he'd give it a try and the Lieutenant went to lunch. When he got back it was finished. He folded it and went out to the car.

"Hartley Brace's. You know, the fancy gate."

As they drove the Lieutenant wondered whether he was about to fall flat on his face. It wouldn't be the first time, but he hoped not. Brace could make it decidedly uncomfortable for him.

The Japanese houseman was slower this time, and it was several minutes before the Lieutenant was ushered into the room with the bric-a-brac. As he waited restlessly, his eye was caught by the orange water color near the door. Now that was an odd one, he thought. Eerie and modern as hell, but there was a quality about it that almost exploded in your face. Maybe there was something in this modern art after all. He was still studying it when Brace spoke at his shoulder, startling him.

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"Two visits in one day? I'm honored, Lieutenant."

"Mr. Brace, did you visit Grimes's studio last night?"

It came almost instantly. "I did not."

"You didn't have a drink with him, by any chance?"

It came slower this time. "I did not."

"To celebrate his winning the award after so many years of failure?"

"Last night?" Brace's gaze flickered over him. Then: "I don't believe so."

He didn't *believe* so? The precise Mr. Brace?

"You don't believe so, Mr. Brace?" he said gently.

"Someone saw me leaving the place?" said Brace. "I may have, come to think of it. I may have, and I may not. I have a dizzying schedule and I forget sometimes."

He thinks the super might have spotted him, thought the Lieutenant. But he's still playing it cool.

"It may be that someone did see you, Mr. Brace. We'd have to bring you face to face to make sure."

"Yes?" said Brace politely. He's waiting to see which way I'll jump, the Lieutenant thought.

"You went to see Grimes last night. Either he invited you over for a drink to thank you for awarding him the prize, or you dropped in on your own to congratulate him. But something was rankling Grimes. Perhaps it was the feeling that you'd been unjust to him all these years, blind to his art."

"What are you saying?" muttered Brace. "Ridiculous!"

"He had to make you see what a fool you were. So he showed you how he painted *Wall Street.* He stood back from the canvas and *threw* the paint. Perhaps while he threw it he laughed and promised to tell the world what a farce the Parthenon award was. Perhaps he promised to make a laughing-stock of you."

"All your perhapses add up to nothing, Lieutenant." Brace had sunk deep in a brocaded chair and was eyeing him warily.

"In a rage you wrenched the palette knife from him and stabbed him. Bits of purple paint stick to the wound. Looking at it from your point of view, I can't blame you, Mr. Brace. After all, your career lay in the balance—your articles, radio appearances, and so on."

"Fantastic," whispered Brace.

"Perhaps," conceded the Lieutenant, "perhaps the damaging publicity would blow over. But the damage to your pride, would that blow over, Mr. Brace? You look like a man who takes art seriously, and very properly too. To hear that you'd been fooled by Grimes, and so clumsily, to have him laugh at you, that was too much."

"You exaggerate my sensitivity, Lieutenant," said Brace coldly. "I'd laugh as hard as the next in the situation you describe."

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"Would you, Mr. Brace? Will you laugh, then, when I release this letter to the newspapers, as Grimes left word for us to do?"

The Lieutenant took the letter from his pocket and Brace reached for it. His hand wasn't too steady, the Lieutenant noted.

"It was in an envelope, stamped and addressed. I have a duty to send it along."

Brace's eyes were moving swiftly over the letter that began, "To the Editor: In view of the controversy that has raged for several decades between the schools of abstract and traditional art, and in view of the articulateness of Mr. Hartley Brace, may I be permitted to recount my own experiences with Mr. Brace? They are enlightening . . ."

The Lieutenant stood under the orange water color and watched Brace out of the corner of his eye. The man resembled a statue; now and then rasping sounds came from him. When he looked up his face was ashen. "This makes me out a fool, a liar, and a hypocrite."

"I thought it was rather strong of Grimes," the Lieutenant said. "Of course, there were those sixteen years he was so bitter about."

Brace stared at him. "It would make it quite simple for you if I confessed, wouldn't it? If I did, it would be only on the condition that you destroyed this letter."

And then it all poured out . . . Brace said he could not have everything he had tried to do with his life destroyed with public ridicule. It was not a question of personal pride, it was a question of the things he believed in. Grimes had done a mad thing, an insane thing, but he'd produced with that shabby trick the only thing he'd ever done that might be called art. And that art must not be laughed at!

Brace's mouth kept working as he talked and the Lieutenant realized that the man did feel deeply enough to kill.

"I'll destroy the letter, Mr. Brace," promised the Lieutenant. "We'll proceed on the assumption that you had an argument, you two. About what—well, we won't go into that too much. Not if you'll just write out your statement . . . and tell me if you still have the palette knife and the glass—"

"The glass is gone. The knife is in the bottom of a tool kit in the basement. Wrapped in cloth."

Brace went to the lacquered desk near the window. Calmly he sat down and calmly he pulled a sheet of paper before him.

"If that letter is not destroyed, Lieutenant, I'll repudiate this confession."

"That letter never existed, Mr. Brace," said the Lieutenant with a wink.

Brace looked at him a moment and his head moved politely. He picked up a pen. The Lieutenant knew, from the art critic's reputation, that he'd turn out a polished, precise piece of writing.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Number 16 in our new series of "first stories" . . . "All's Well" is authentic Americana—the stuff of regional folklore. The author is in his late twenties—married, no children, one dog, one cat. He works as reporter and night city editor on "The Charleston Gazette" (Charleston, West Virginia), lives in a cabin in the woods, traps muskrats, hunts squirrels, and listens to people in his neck of the woods who talk like the Sheriff in his "first story." Mr. Haught did spend one year away from his beloved West Virginia—as press aide to a Senator; but he didn't like Washington life and returned to the woods and streams and lakes. Who said the influence of Thoreau is dead?

ALL'S WELL

by JAMES A. HAUGHT

IF YOU ASK ME, THEM MYSTERY magazines and detective stories are the biggest nuisance around, because they give folks the wrong notion about things. You know how they are, full of secret clues and mysterious codes and beautiful women and all that stuff. You'd think every murder case that comes along is some sort of glamorous puzzle that nobody but a master-mind detective could get to the bottom of.

Well, I've been Sheriff of Buckalew County for 14 years now, and I'm here to say it just isn't that way. No, sirree.

I've seen better than two dozen murders, I guess, and there's never been a one of them that wasn't just a simple case of somebody getting drunk, or mad, or scared, or crazy, and dropping the samson post on somebody else. Almost every time they either give themselves up or kill themselves, so there's never any mystery at all.

The folks around here don't even call them murders, usually—they just call them killings. You recall the time that Burvil Midkiff stuffed his brother down the privy over the preacher's wife? Well, there wasn't no glamorous mystery there, because he walked in and told us about it before we even heard of it. And it was the same way when Denzil Hicks knocked Bad-Eye Skeens in the head with a nine-ball during a pool game.

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But still all them magazines and movies keep people so full of Sherlock Holmes ideas that they pester the ticking out of me and my deputy with a bunch of wild "deductions" every time there's a killing.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. You recall the time that old Winehead Koontz killed Stancil Sydenstricker and robbed him, then when he sobered up and saw what he had done, he drowned himself in the creek?

That was about seven years ago, I guess. Handsome Snell was my deputy then. They called him that, or usually just Hanse, because he was a bachelor and sort of a ladies' man, but he was as smart a deputy as ever I had work with me. I always thought there wasn't any case that the two of us together couldn't break in one day.

Well, Hanse dropped in at the jail that night, and we were just sitting down to a hand of set-back when Harv Estep called up and said he had found Stance Sydenstricker stretched out beside Turkey Run Road, shot between the eyes, with his pockets turned inside out.

We jumped in the cruiser and lit out. The cruiser was Hanse's old station wagon with a red light on top. He took the light off when he went home at night.

When we got there, there was Stance dead, sure enough. He had been shot twice, right between the eyes, and his billfold and pocket watch were gone.

To show you how quick Hanse was, we hadn't been there more than five minutes before he said, "This looks like the work of Winehead Koontz." I asked him how he figured that and he said he had heard Winehead and Stance quarreling the day before. Stance was deacon and temperance chairman at the Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Church on Turkey Run, and it was a known fact that he sometimes cornered Winehead and others of the town's topers and gave them a hellfire lecture about their sinning.

Well, it wasn't ten minutes after that until two of the Casto girls came rattling up in their dad's pickup and started shouting both at once about old Winehead being found floating dead in Mud Creek not two miles away. I looked at Hanse and nodded and we lit out again.

By the time we got there, they had fished Winehead out onto the bank and Hud Syhawk was giving him artificial respiration, but it wasn't any use. We could see that he was dead, and there was a big knot on the side of his head where he must have hit a rock when he jumped in. After a while we rolled him over and went through his pockets and, sure enough, there were Stance's watch and wallet.

Well, that just about settled the case. Anybody could see that Winehead had got on a good one and had laid out for Stance; then when

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he came out of it enough to see what he had done, it was too much for him. Winehead always was sort of a timid man when he wasn't drinking, but that wasn't often.

The next thing to do was send somebody to break the news to Mrs. Sydensticker. I remembered that Hanse had always been good friends with her and Stance, so I asked him if he'd do it and he said he would. She was a pretty little thing a lot younger than Stance, but I still didn't envy Hanse his chore. Even though they didn't have any children, it would be hard news for her to take.

After Hanse left, I let the two undertakers in town have one body apiece. I didn't figure it would be right to have the killer and the victim resting in the same place and, besides, both undertakers were standing by with their ambulances. They both wanted Stance, so they flipped a coin. End-of-the-Trail got Stance and the Holy Peace Chapel got Winehead.

Then there wasn't anything more to do but go home and wait for the inquest.

The next morning I got up early and drove out to the Sydenstricker place to pick up Mrs. Sydenstricker and bring her into town for the inquest. Hanse was there when I arrived. I guess he must have come back again in the morning to comfort the poor young woman, who looked mighty pretty in spite of her suffering. I could see that he had been holding her while she cried, because there was lipstick on his shirt.

When we started into town for the inquest, Hanse looked so tired and rumpled that I told him to go on home for the day, and I would repeat his testimony for him, hearing Stance and Winehead quarreling.

Well, as you can imagine, the inquest was pretty routine, and Doc McGraw ruled it murder and suicide, and the case was closed. But here's the part I was telling you about—the big detective ideas that people are always getting from the mystery magazines. In the week that followed there must have been a half a dozen people come to me with "deductions" they had figured out.

Holly Spoon, the barber, said how could a shaky old drunk like Winehead shoot well enough to hit Stance twice between the eyes, but I reassured him that Winehead probably had stood real close.

Then Mrs. Wells, the school principal's wife, said that if Winehead had killed himself in remorse, wouldn't he have thrown away the watch and billfold first; but I said he probably didn't even remember them as he sobered up.

All their detective-playing didn't amount to a hill of beans, though, and most of the town went on talking about what a terrible thing it was, and the preachers preached that it showed that liquor is the work of the devil.

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The only other news that happened after that was when it was learned how much insurance Stance had left his wife. Everybody felt real good about it, saying it was wonderful that he thought so much of her that he took out a $50,000 policy just four months before. Dorsel Fluharty, the insurance agent, told me that it was Hanse himself who talked Stance into taking the policy, and I felt mighty proud of my deputy.

It was only a couple of months after the killing that Mrs. Sydenstricker sold her place and moved away. She said she didn't want to live any more where Stance had been killed.

And not long after, Hanse left too. He said he had gotten a good job in St. Louis. I hated to see him go, and I was sorry to lose the cruiser, but you can't stand in the way of a man's progress.

Well, nobody heard anything about either him or Mrs. Sydenstricker for a long time, and I don't suppose we ever would have if it wasn't for the Kincaid boy that's in the Navy. He wrote back to his folks last fall that his ship had gone to Hawaii clear out in the Pacific Ocean, and he had run across Hanse and Mrs. Sydenstricker there on a beach in front of a big hotel, only she wasn't Mrs. Sydenstricker any more. She and Hanse had chanced to meet again and they had got married.

It's strange how things work out sometimes. Who'd have thought that the two of them, leaving here like they did after the trouble, would run into each other again some place and fall for each other?

It's sort of inspiring, and most everybody around here feels sort of warm inside that everything turned out so well for them.

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DIRECTORY OF MYSTERY & SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

"First Story" Number 17 . . . and a strange one, to say the least. Offbeat—but with a curiously appealing charm. Zany, wacky—you name it—but we think one of our readers hit the mark in commenting: "I got the feeling that it was something out of Alice in Wonderland."

The author lives in Rockland County, New York—"at a moot point between the country and the suburbs." (Never-Never Land?) Her life "contains" a husband who is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Rutgers University; three daughters, "the oldest of whom, at 16, is a serious and severe critic of mysteries"; and a poodle.

Mrs. Stein has a way with her . . . with a touch of—who? Her story has an elusive, just-beyond-the-fingertips quality.

THE HONOR OF DOING HIM IN

by AGNES H. STEIN

WHO KILLED CHARLES ROBBINS? Professor Charles Robbins, that is. I was trying to review the case, sanely, calmly, in the peace and silence of my office. Quiet, I pleaded, but they were at it again. Each of my suspects was jumping up and down, demanding star billing as the Murderer. You'd have thought Professor Robbins was Public Enemy Number One.

All his friends and family were clamoring for the honor of doing him in—rather, of "having done him in," as Professor Robbins himself would have put it. For Professor Robbins had been a respected member of the English faculty at Mandrake College. His students were, officially, mourning him, and to the faculty he was, speaking academically, a "great loss"—exactly what he had seemed to be to his family when he was alive.

I gathered that Professor Robbins was the kind who spoke soft words of wisdom and who had a word for everything. Quoting the President of Mandrake: "A lesser light, who, in Mandrake, had found exactly his bushel. Only Mandrake College, withdrawn as it is from the world, could afford to nourish a man like Charles Robbins. This, the place which is burying him, alone could permit his brilliance to shine."

I heard similar references to the backwater nature of this place, if

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not the same sentiments, repeated by the Professor's niece and adopted daughter. I had just come on the scene of the crime—indeed, the two of us were standing in the Professor's study looking at the body. It was slumped in a chair, and the eyes which no one had the mercy to close were fixed rigidly toward heaven.

"Golly!" Betty Robbins said. "I'm waiting for the halo to drop. His eyes are on the glory, all right. They always were."

"He was your father, Miss Robbins?"

"Step. And he stepped, onwards and upwards. I guess he wanted to be President. Of the college, that is. Otherwise I must confess he was my uncle. But we all called him Professor."

"You didn't like him?"

"Nobody did—nobody that knew him. Or is it 'who' knew him?"

I shrugged.

Betty laughed. "I forget. He's dead. I can talk now and to hell with grammar. That was one of his charming tricks: in the middle of an argument he'd catch you on an error in usage. And of course he was always right. Even so, he wanted to be President."

"And what was it you two argued about?"

"There was only one thing I wanted—to get the hell out of this town. But he wouldn't give me taxi fare to the station. I had to go to college here! How would it look if his own niece preferred some other institution! Do you know what he made me do? I had to enroll in his English 161. So that he could stand at the door three times a week, lay his hand in my head as it passed by, and smile. Oh, that smile! It was benign, that's what it was. He doesn't have it now, does he? Too bad. He would have wanted it on his way up. He wasn't the kind to go down, I can assure you. 'Such a lovely man,' the President's wife used to say, and then the tears would come to her eyes. She has hay fever, you know, and in my own little way I could have cried too. But I don't know why I'm telling you all this."

I didn't know either. For all her bitter words, Miss Robbins seemed gay and young and too pretty to be cooped up in the county jail. I reminded her that I was investigating her stepfather's death.

"You want to know if I killed him? I'd tell you if I knew for sure. I've plotted it so long that now I don't know if I actually did it or not."

"You seem to assume it's murder."

"As I say, I've been thinking of it so long. I thought of a poisoned blow-dart through the library window. I even went steady for a while with Chet Blake—he's in biology, you know; but his only interest is frogs. You didn't happen to see any arrow about?"

"We haven't combed the room

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yet. There's so much obvious evidence around." There was a gun lying on the desk with the casual air of a pencil.

"You see, I was practicing archery back of the house and . . ."

"If I find the missing arrow, I'll return it. Now, about your fa- I mean, the Professor . . ."

"I may just have been lucky enough to accidentally on purpose contribute in my small way to the betterment of the human race."

I was glad I could stop listening to her. In the French doors that opened on the garden stood a young man holding a slingshot. I was not at all surprised to hear Miss Robbins say, "Hi, David."

The newcomer was young and manly and I knew the curls on his head would not stop short of his chest. I've always been inclined to both baldness and flabby muscles, so perhaps that's why I approached the matter directly and crudely.

"Did you kill Goliath?" I pointed to the sunken chest of the Professor.

The young man hesitated and when I heard his voice I could understand why. His falsetto was stronger than both muscles and curls. "I don't think so. But I might have," he piped.

"Everything is possible," I admitted.

"Under the sun," the girl added like a good student.

"Well, I suppose I was," the youth mused. "The sun was climbing slow but sure . . ."

"Stop it, Dave!" Betty Robbins marched over to him and held his arm tight as she looked him straight in the eye. "You've got to concentrate. Now stop those birds fluttering before your eyes. Tell me, do you *really* think you might have killed the Professor?"

Dave tried disentangling himself from her grasp.

"I know how much it means to you, Betty, but I must be honest. I can't be sure. You see the sun was in my eyes when I saw old Tom climbing the cherry tree . . ."

This was the tree outside the window it was in direct line with the Professor's chair.

"Well?" Betty prodded.

"If I ever get my hands on that cat . . ."

"You won't, Dave. You can't get your hands on anything—not to speak of your mind." Betty tossed her arms in the air and sank into the chair facing the Professor. Her legs stretched out and almost struck the dead feet. She had no reverence. I could tell from her laugh.

" 'Sit up, Betty. One owes the dead a certain respect,' " she mimicked her dead uncle, nevertheless pulling in her legs.

"You know, I practically built that nest for those bluebirds. You know how rare those birds are in this region? I lured them here with bits of string and old feathers, and then that cat had to come along. I haven't been to class for a week just guarding those birds."

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"So you took a slingshot to old Tom," Betty finished for him.

"And maybe hit the Professor. Subconsciously, you know, I might have been aiming for him all the time," Dave added brightly.

"Well, I wish you would have just once, *just once,* stood up to him consciously. But you flapped your wings like those precious birds of yours whenever he opened his mouth."

"But he's dead, isn't he? And who killed him? Answer me that."

"We don't know," I interjected. "That's what we're trying to find out. There is a bruise, and some blood on the back of his head. But the weapon is missing."

Dave looked foolishly at his slingshot, then grinned.

"It won't do," I said. "The rock, the stone, whatever you might have used—where is it?"

Betty got up and knocked against the Professor's foot, dislodging a pebble beneath his shoe.

"Too small," I protested.

"With sufficient force," Dave said. "That's all it needed, sufficient force."

Betty kicked the stone contemptuously. "I refuse to believe he slew Goliath."

David moved so close to the girl he practically brushed her eyes with his nose. "You know what you're doing? You're compensating. You want to take it out on me. You want me to be a weakling so that you can dominate me the way the Professor did you. You won't *let* me be strong." His voice deepened and he gripped her arm firmly.

"David! I didn't know you could. Please dear, it doesn't really matter. You didn't have to kill him."

"You're being kittenish," David said. "And I don't like cats."

"I'm sure you don't." We all turned to face the speaker. It was Mrs. Robbins who stood in the doorway. Two bright-red spots made her green eyes glow. In her forties, she had that not-quite-there look of a woman of faded beauty—or beauty yet to come. The kind of woman in whom something is missing—the spark of the living moment. And yet, as her excitement mounted, she almost achieved that spark.

"It's Tom," she said to Betty. "He's bad. It's as if he had been hit with something."

"Maybe he got in the way of my arrow," Betty said.

"Oh, no," Mrs. Robbins protested. "You couldn't have. Why, Tom's a member of the family."

"So's Uncle Charlie. Or was."

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Robbins mused. "I almost forgot about him. What with Tom feeling bad and Will getting hysterical in the kitchen. While I'm trying to finish up the flowers for the dinner tonight. There'll be fourteen at the table, Betty. The dean . . ."

"Aunt Mae, only thirteen. Remember?"

"Oh, dear! An unlucky number."

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I half expected the corpse to get up and walk off, washing his hands of the whole affair. I'm sure the Professor never expected to meet such sang-froid among his dearest and nearest or he would not have considered it worthwhile to die. Or perhaps he had not given the matter that much thought. Victims usually don't.

"I suppose we might as well call off the dinner. I just don't know what he would have wanted."

"He'd want the dinner, all right. With all the toasts and all the glory. But with his body lying in some cold morgue—no, he couldn't stomach that. It's a tough choice for him, all right." Betty folded her arms on the problem.

"What do you think, Dave?" Mrs. Robbins pleaded. Her voice would always plead, and I guessed that the late Professor had had a hand in that.

"Well," David wondered, "maybe he left a will, a final wish." His eyes roved over the desk.

"People who get murdered rarely have that much foresight," Betty said. Nevertheless she helped search the desk.

"Just a minute," I shouted. "You're disturbing the evidence. Leave that desk alone."

"Don't be stuffy. No one here is trying to hide anything. Unless you are. Here it is."

I was too late to stop her. She picked up a diary and began reading the entry under today's date.

"'Tonight we shall be celebrating an honor I have long awaited—the chairmanship of the English Department at this humble but glorious institution.'"

"It sounds so like him," Mrs. Robbins cried.

Betty read on. "'I regret very much, of course, what this will do to poor Will. I am afraid, sadly afraid, that his jealousy . . .'"

And there it stopped.

"That doesn't help on the dinner," Mrs. Robbins said.

But my ears had landed on "Will" for the second time. Who was Will? "Will," I spoke my thoughts.

"Yes, will does help, I suppose. It's something I've always been sadly lacking in—or so the Professor said." With a deep breath Mrs. Robbins gathered up her courage. "No, I won't—I won't give him a memorial dinner. He's dead, that's all. And how could I honestly be mourning it?"

"Mrs. Robbins," I said, "may I assume that you at least are not making any claim to having murdered him? Now tell me, who is Will?"

Mrs. Robbins looked at me as if she had not heard a word. She and Dave had that much in common. When they weren't getting excited about their birds and cats, they remained safely lost in a world of their own making.

"Do you know," she said, "there's something I've had on my mind all morning. I might as well tell you

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all now. I think I did kill the Professor." The bright spots appeared again, making her green eyes shine cat-like.

"Oh, Auntie you couldn't have," Betty protested. "You were content to stick with him until your dying day. Certainly not his."

"No, no, I must tell you. I got up early this morning to make my Angel Food cake and get that out of the way. I always make Angel Food. The Professor insisted on it ever since my recipe got into the Campus Cook Book. He was a stickler for tradition, you know."

"I hope you'll save me the crumbs, Mrs. Robbins," Dave said. "For my birds, I mean."

"Well, I wanted to invite you, Dave. But you know the Professor. He couldn't bear the slingshots in his preserves."

"Me and the cherries," Betty explained.

If I had more hair I would have torn it.

"Let's stop right here," I said. "No more confessions. Just an orderly account of the sequence of events. Now, what time were you in the kitchen, Mrs. Robbins?"

"Nine, nine thirty, ten . . ." Mrs. Robbins said vaguely.

"I wasn't in the kitchen," Betty testified. "I slept till nine, decided to cut my classes in honor of the Professor's great day. I was afraid somebody might congratulate me. And at ten I went out to practice archery."

"I felt your arrow as you went by," David confessed. "You know, you might have hurt somebody."

"Sh . . . all of you. I want to tell you about this morning," Mrs. Robbins insisted. "I made the cake and it was beautiful, as always. I started on the icing when suddenly I stopped. My stomach sank. All the fluffy white Angel Foods I've made throughout the years began to weigh on me. I had to do something different. So I decided to color the icing. Green."

"Oh, no, Auntie. Not green!"

"Well, it is spring, you know. The robins would like it," David said.

"Thank you, David." Mrs. Robbins beamed. "I had just finished, it was still in the bowl, when I turned around and there was the Professor. He still had his hat on—he'd been to see the doctor, you know."

"Anything wrong, Mrs. Robbins? Who was the doctor?"

"Annual checkup with Dr. Vincent," She was impatient with the interruption. "There it was. Green icing and the Professor staring at it. 'What on earth is this?' he asked. And suddenly I got mad. 'Why don't you taste it and see?' I said to him. He took the spoon and did—the Professor always had a sweet tooth. And that was the death of him."

"It couldn't have been that bad, Auntie."

"I'm afraid it was. You see, as he

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was licking the spoon I clearly saw two jars on the shelf before me. Both were green. One was the coloring and the other . . ." She looked about her wildly. "Well, the other was the ant powder. And I couldn't be sure . . ."

"You didn't stop him?" I asked.

"Not the Professor," Mrs. Robbins said. "He always made me look so foolish. I couldn't help thinking it would serve him right."

"And wouldn't it have!" Betty slapped her thighs. "Ant poison! What a glorious end for the Professor!"

"No, it won't do," David interjected. "I'm afraid you underestimate the power of a human stomach. He couldn't possibly have eaten enough, even for a man of his tooth, to lay him low."

With every one solving the crime I began to feel superfluous and started pacing the room. The revolver on the desk. It was loaded but unfired. The gloves on the dead man's hands . . .

"Why is he wearing gloves? On a bright spring morning?"

"Allergy," Betty explained. "Sensitivity to dust. He used to blame us for not opening the books enough."

I looked at the bruise on the Professor's head, the supine position of the body, and wondered: "What hit him?"

"I'm afraid it was I, sir." And another confessor entered the scene, this time through the French doors. I looked to my older acquaintances for enlightenment.

"I am Will Muddleford. But then I suppose the name can mean nothing. And now I suppose it never will." He sighed.

So this was Will. His thick lenses made him appear as hazy as his vision was. He walked through the doors and I expected him to fall over the chair in his path. He did.

Mrs. Robbins bustled over to help him up and dust him off. "Oh, Will," she murmured, "you're always falling over things and now it's the Professor's dead body.'"

"You're a friend of the family?" I asked.

He looked at the people gathered here and shook his head. "I hardly know what I am at the moment."

"Look," Betty said, "before you get all the wrong ideas I'll clear them up for you. Dear Will was the Professor's closest rival. Will is the only brain in the English Department—when he isn't stumbling into something."

"Well, in my way I have occasionally stumbled *onto* something." Will began a cough-like laugh and froze as he realized he didn't have his captive class-audience.

Betty went on. "The Professor claimed to be Will's friend, but actually he was jealous of him. I know he was or he wouldn't have made up that absurd story."

"Oh, yes . . ." Mrs. Robbins choked on a giggle.

"You see a long time ago Auntie

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Mae decided she had had enough. It was something about her cat, Tom, and the Professor's rosebushes. Anyway, she told him it was the end. Well, the Professor couldn't stand being thrown over for an old tomcat, so he accused Auntie of being in love with Will Muddleford. She didn't dare deny it—she never could face up to the Professor. And this seemed as good a way as any of getting out. Well, then the dear Professor claimed she couldn't leave him—the scandal, he said, would ruin him. So she stayed. And before you knew it the whole campus was talking of the blighted love affair. Auntie Mae became a romantic figure. I think finally even she began to believe the story, and then of course, Will, who is all chivalry, did too."

"My dear," Will murmured, and thinking to stroke the head of his beloved he knocked down a plaster Shakespeare. It almost killed the Professor again.

"And now?" I asked.

"I hadn't thought of that. What will the poor things do about it now?" Betty wondered.

"Will is willing," he announced.

We all gave him a classroom smile for his chivalry. I scratched my head.

"Well," Will said, and put out his hand. We all ducked as the top layer of books fell from the shelf. This man was dangerous.

"It happened this way," Will said. "I was standing in the garden composing my speech of congratulation. I wanted to be among the first. No hard feelings, you know. The Professor was in the study. And then I saw him with the gun in his hand—at least, I thought I did. May have been a book, come to think of it. Anyway, I picked up a rock and I think I threw it."

"You *think?* Where is the rock?"

"I don't know. You see, it was quite a heavy rock. It threw me and when I awoke he was dead."

"Now don't be silly, Will," Mrs. Robbins said. "If the rock threw you, how could you have thrown the rock?"

They were still arguing, each insisting that only he—or she—could have killed the Professor, when I sat down at the Professor's desk to think. Every problem has a solution, I told myself. It's only a matter of asking the right questions.

I reviewed the evidence. There was the problem of the weapon, which obviously was not in the room. Had the murderer removed it, counting on one of the others to claim the crime? Or was he being protected by one of the other claimants?

I looked at Mrs. Robbins.

"It's the whole truth you want, isn't it?" she said. "Whenever I tried to hide anything, the Professor got it out of me. I guess it will always be that way."

"Tell me, Mrs. Robbins, was Will Muddleford the last man to see the Professor alive?"

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"I don't know. I don't know who looked at him last. But you're right. I was there. The Professor called me in—just after he tasted the icing. He was wearing those gloves and a very happy smile. He showed me the gun. He was going to kill himself, he announced. He had nothing left to live for. But before he died he was going to see that Will would not benefit. He had written that last entry in his diary to cast suspicion on Will. As he pointed out to me, if I dared destroy it I would only implicate myself as an accomplice. Everyone knew there was a diary and nobody would believe suicide of the Professor. He wasn't the kind. And of course he was wearing those gloves. Oh, it was a clever plan he had."

"But why did he tell you about it? Wasn't he afraid that if you knew . . ."

"No one would believe *me*. They all thought we were in love, Will and I. And he, the Professor, was going to get the satisfaction of seeing at least part of the effect of his plan before he died. I was ready to kill him then. But he only laughed. What good would that do? he asked. He was ready to do the job himself. In any case, Will would be blamed."

"What about Will? Go on, Mrs. Robbins."

"Well, the Professor picked up the gun to show me it was loaded. It was then I saw Will standing outside the window. He was holding a flower pot and his eyes were blinking behind his glasses. I didn't know what he had seen or what would happen—I only knew his presence there was undesirable. I wanted to scare him off. 'Will,' I shrieked, and Will fell. I ran out to him. When I saw that he had only fainted, I decided to let him awaken alone. I hurried back to the study. I wasn't going to let the Professor do it. Only now he was dead. But the gun wasn't fired and I still don't know what hit him. Did Will manage to hit him before he fell? I don't think so. Because Will thinks *I* did it. I know he does. It's his chivalry."

"Chivalry?" Will asked. "No, dear, it's my vision."

"What *could* have happened?" Mrs. Robbins persisted.

"I can't imagine, Lady," I said.

Tipping my hat, I walked out. Back to the peace of my office. But even here my imagination fails me.

How am I going to discover the murderer when none of them could be sure who'd done it?

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a crime novelette by

AUTHOR: **SINCLAIR LEWIS**

TITLE: ***The Willow Walk***

TYPE: Crime Story

CRIMINAL: Jasper Holt

LOCALE: Vernon, U.S., and environs

TIME: About 1918

COMMENTS: *The tale of a most carefully planned crime, told with minute reportorial detail as if written by an omniscient Recording Angel—but actually written by the first American winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, the famous author of* MAIN STREET *and* BABBITT.

EDITORS' FILE CAED

FROM THE DRAWER OF HIS TABLE Jasper Holt took a plane of window glass. He laid a sheet of paper on the glass and wrote, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party."

He studied his round business-college script and rewrote the sentence in a small finicky hand, that of a studious old man. Ten times he copied the words in that false pinched writing. He tore up the paper, burned the fragments in his large ashtray, and washed the delicate ashes down his stationary wash-bowl. He replaced the pane of glass in the drawer, tapping it with satisfaction. A glass underlay does not retain an impression.

Jasper Holt was as nearly respectable as his room, which, with its frilled chairs and pansy-painted pincushion, was the best in the aristocratic boarding house of Mrs. Lyons. He was a wiry, slightly bald, black-haired man of thirty-eight,

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wearing an easy gray flannel suit and a white carnation. His hands were peculiarly compact and nimble. He gave the appearance of being a youngish lawyer or bond salesman. Actually he was senior paying teller in the Lumber National Bank in the city of Vernon.

He looked at a thin expensive gold watch. It was six thirty, on Wednesday—toward dusk of a tranquil spring day. He picked up his hooked walking stick and his gray silk gloves and trudged downstairs. He met his landlady in the lower hall and inclined his head. She effusively commented on the weather.

"I shall not be here for dinner," he said aimiably.

"Very well, Mr. Holt. My, but aren't you always going out with your swell friends though! I read in the *Herald* that you were going to be a star in another of those society plays in the Community Theater. I guess you'd be an actor if you wasn't a banker, Mr. Holt."

"No, I'm afraid I haven't much temperament." His voice was cordial, but his smile was a mere mechanical sidewise twist of the lip muscles. "You're the one that's got the stage presence. Bet you'd be a regular Ethel Barrymore if you didn't have to take care of us."

"My, but you're such a flatterer!"

He bowed his way out and walked sedately down the street to a public garage. Nodding to the night attendant, but saying nothing, he started his roadster and drove out of the garage, away from the center of Vernon, toward the suburb of Rosebank.

He did not go directly to Rosebank. He went seven blocks out of his way and halted on Fandall Avenue—one of those petty main thoroughfares which, with their motion picture palaces, their groceries, laundries, undertakers' establishments and lunchrooms, serve as local centers for districts of mean residences.

He got out of the car and pretended to look at the tires, kicking them to see how much air they had. While he did so he covertly looked up and down the street. He saw no one whom he knew. He went into the Parthenon Confectionery Store.

The Parthenon Store makes a specialty of those ingenious candy boxes that resemble bound books. The back of the box is of imitation leather, with a stamping simulating the title of a novel. The edges are apparently the edges of a number of pages. But these pages are hollowed out, and the inside is to be filled with candy.

Jasper gazed at the collection of book boxes and chose the two whose titles had the nearest approach to dignity—*Sweets to the Sweet* and *The Ladies' Delight*. He asked the clerk to fill these with the less expensive grade of mixed chocolates, and to wrap them.

From the candy shop he went to the drug store that carried an assortment of reprinted novels, and from these picked out two of the same

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sentimental type as the titles on the booklike boxes. These also he had wrapped.

He strolled out of the drug store, slipped into a lunchroom, got a lettuce sandwich, doughnuts, and a cup of coffee at the greasy marble counter, took them to a chair with a table arm in the dim rear of the lunchroom and hastily devoured them. As he came out and returned to his car he again glanced along the street.

He fancied that he knew a man who was approaching. He could not be sure. From the breast up, the man seemed familiar, as did the customers of the bank whom he viewed through the wicket of the teller's window. When he saw them in the street he could never be sure of them. It seemed extraordinary to find that these persons, who to him were nothing but faces with attached arms that held out checks and received money, could walk about, had legs and a gait and a manner of their own.

He walked to the curb and stared up at the cornice of one of the stores, puckering his lips, giving an impersonation of a man inspecting a building. With the corner of an eye he followed the approaching man. The man ducked his head as he neared, and greeted him, "Hello, Brother Teller." Jasper seemed startled, gave the "Oh! Oh, how are you!" of sudden recognition, and mumbled, "Looking after a little bank property."

The man passed on.

Jasper got into his car and drove back to the street that would take him out to the suburb of Rosebank. As he left Fandall Avenue he peered at his watch. It was five minutes to seven.

At a quarter past seven he passed through the main street of Rosebank and turned into a lane that was but little changed since the time when it had been a country road. A few jerry-built villas of freckled paint did shoulder on it, but for the most part it ran through swamps spotted with willow groves, the spongy ground covered with scatterings of dry leaves and bark. Opening on this lane was a dim-rutted grassy private road which disappeared into one of the willow groves.

Jasper sharply swung his car between the crumbly gateposts and along the bumpy private road. He made an abrupt turn, came in sight of an unpainted shed, and shot the car into it without cutting down his speed, so that he almost hit the back of the shed with his front fenders.

He shut off the engine, climbed out quickly and ran back toward the gate. From the shield of the bank of alder bushes he peered out. Two clattering women were going down the public road. They stared in through the gate and half halted.

"That's where that hermit lives," said one of them.

"Oh, you mean the one that's writing a religious book and never

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comes out till evening? Some kind of a preacher?"

"Yes, that's the one. John Holt, I think his name is. I guess he's kind of crazy. He lives in the old Beaudette house. But you can't see it from here—it's clear through the block, on the next street."

"I heard he was crazy. But I just saw an automoible go in here."

"Oh, that's his cousin or brother or something—lives in the city. They say he's rich, and such a nice fellow."

The two women ambled on, their clatter blurring with distance. Standing behind the alders Jasper rubbed the palm of one hand with the fingers of the other. The palm was dry with nervousness. But he grinned.

He returned to the shed and entered a brick-paved walk almost a block long, walled and sheltered by overhanging willows. Once it had been a pleasant path; carved wooden benches were placed along it, and it widened to a court with a rock garden, a fountain, and a stone bench.

The rock garden had degenerated into a riot of creepers sprawling over the sharp stones; the paint had peeled from the fountain, leaving its iron cupids and naiads eaten with rust. The bricks of the wall were smeared with lichens and moss and were untidy with windrows of dry leaves and caked earth. Many of the bricks were broken; the walk was hilly in its unevenness. From willows and bricks and scuffled earth rose a damp chill.

But Jasper did not seem to note the dampness. He hastened along the walk to the house—a structure of heavy stone which, for this newish Midwestern land, was very ancient. It had been built by a French fur trader in 1839. The Chippewas had scalped a man in its dooryard. The heavy back door was guarded by an unexpected expensive modern lock.

Jasper opened it with a flat key and closed it behind him. It locked on a spring. He was in a crude kitchen, the shades of which were drawn. He passed through the kitchen and dining room into the living room. Dodging chairs and tables in the darkness as though he was used to them he went to each of the three windows of the living room and made sure that all the shades were down before he lighted the student lamp on the gate-legged table. As the glow crept over the drab walls Jasper bobbed his head with satisfaction. Nothing had been touched since his last visit.

The room was musty with the smell of old green rep upholstery and leather books. It had not been dusted for months. Dust sheeted the stiff red velvet chairs, the uncomfortable settee, the chill white marble fireplace, the immense glass-fronted bookcase that filled one side of the room.

The atmosphere was unnatural to this capable business man, this Jas-

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per Holt. But Jasper did not seem oppressed. He briskly removed the wrappers from the genuine books and from the candy-box imitations of books. One of the two wrappers he laid on the table and smoothed out. Upon this he poured the candy from the two boxes. The other wrapper and the strings he stuffed into the fireplace and immediately burned.

Crossing to the bookcase he unlocked one section on the bottom shelf. There was a row of rather cheap-looking novels on this shelf, and of these at least six were actually such candy boxes as he had purchased that evening.

Only one shelf of the bookcase was given over to anything so frivolous as novels. The others were filled with black-covered, speckle-leaved, dismal books of history, theology, biography—the shabby-genteel sort of books you find on the fifteen-cent table at a second-hand bookshop. Over these Jasper pored for a moment as though he was memorizing their titles.

He took down *The Life of the Rev. Jeremiah Bodfish* and read aloud: "In those intimate discourses with his family that followed evening prayers I once heard Brother Bodfish observe that Philo Judaeus—whose scholarly career always calls to my mind the adumbrations of Melanchthon upon the essence of rationalism—were a mere sophist—"

Jasper slammed the book shut, remarking contentedly, "That'll do. Philo Judaeus—good name to spring."

He relocked the bookcase and went upstairs. In a small bedroom at the right of the upper hall an electric light was burning. Presumably the house had been deserted till Jasper's entrance, but a prowler in the yard might have judged from this ever-burning light that someone was in the residence.

The bedroom was Spartan—an iron bed, one straight chair, a washstand, a heavy oak bureau. Jasper scrambled to unlock the bottom drawer of the bureau, yank it open, take out a wrinkled shiny suit of black, a pair of black shoes, a small black bow tie, a Gladstone collar, a white shirt with starched bosom, a speckly brown felt hat and a wig—an expensive and excellent wig with artfully unkempt hair of a faded brown.

He stripped off his attractive flannel suit, wing collar, blue tie, custom-made silk shirt, and cordovan shoes, and speedily put on the wig and those gloomy garments. As he donned them the corners of his mouth began to droop. Leaving the light on and his own clothes flung on the bed he descended the stairs. He was obviously not the same Jasper, but less healthy, less practical, less agreeable, and decidedly more aware of the sorrow and long thoughts of the dreamer.

Indeed it must be understood that now he was not Jasper Holt, but

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Jasper's twin brother, John Holt, hermit and religious fanatic.

John Holt, twin brother of Jasper Holt the bank teller, rubbed his eyes as though he had for hours been absorbed in study, and crawled through the living room, through the tiny hall, to the front door. He opened it, picked up a couple of circulars that the postman had dropped through the letter slot in the door, went out and locked the door behind him. He was facing a narrow front yard, neater than the willow walk at the back, on a suburban street more populous than the straggly back lane.

A street arc illuminated the yard and showed that a card was tacked on the door. John touched the card, snapped it with a nail of his finger to make sure it was securely tacked. In that light he could not read it, but he knew that it was inscribed in a small finicky hand: *Agents kindly do not disturb, bell will not be answered, occupant of the house engaged in literary work.*

John stood on the doorstep until he made out his neighbor on the right—a large stolid commuter who was walking before his house smoking an after-dinner cigar. John poked to the fence and sniffed at a spray of lilac blossoms till the neighbor called over, "Nice evening."

"Yes, it seems to be pleasant."

John's voice was like Jasper's but it was more guttural, and his speech had less assurance.

"How's the story going?"

"It is—it is very difficult. So hard to comprehend all the inner meanings of the prophecies. Well, I must be hastening to Soul Hope Hall. I trust we shall see you there some Wednesday or Sunday evening. I bid you good night, sir."

John wavered down the street to the drug store. He purchased a bottle of ink. In a grocery that kept open evenings he got two pounds of cornmeal, two pounds of flour, pound of bacon, a half pound of butter, six eggs, and a can of condensed milk.

"Shall we deliver them?" asked the clerk.

John looked at him sharply. He realized that this was a new man, who did not know his customs. He said rebukingly, "No, I always carry my parcels. I am writing a book. I am never to be disturbed."

He paid for the provisions out of a postal money order for thirty-five dollars and received the change. The cashier of the store was accustomed to cashing these money orders, which were always sent to John from South Vernon, by one R. J. Smith. John took the bundle of food and walked out of the store.

"That fellow's kind of a nut isn't he?" asked the new clerk.

The cashier explained: "Yep. Doesn't even take fresh milk—uses condensed for everything! What do you think of that! And they say he burns up all his garbage—never has anything in the ashcan except ashes.

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If you knock at his door he never answers it, fellow told me. All the time writing this book of his. Religious crank, I guess. Has a little income though—guess his folks were pretty well fixed. Comes out once in a while in the evening and pokes round town. We used to laugh about him, but we've kind of got used to him. Been here about a year, I guess it is."

John was serenely passing down the main street of Rosebank. At the dingier end of it he turned in at a hallway marked by a lighted sign announcing in crude housepainter's letters: SOUL HOPE FRATERNITY HALL. EXPERIENCE MEETING. ALL WELCOME.

It was eight o'clock. The members of the Soul Hope cult had gathered in their hall above a bakery. Theirs was a tiny, tight-minded sect. They asserted that they alone obeyed the scriptural tenets, that they alone were certain to be saved, that all other denominations were damned by unapostolic luxury, that it was wicked to have organs or ministers or any meeting places save plain halls.

The members themselves conducted the meetings, one after another rising to give an interpretation of the scriptures or to rejoice in gathering with the faithful, while the others commenced with "Hallelujah!" and "Amen, brother, amen! They were plainly dressed, not overfed, somewhat elderly, and a rather happy congregation. The most honored was John Holt.

John had come to Rosebank only eleven months before. He had bought the Beaudette house with the library of the recent occupant, a retired clergyman, and had paid for them in new one-hundred-dollar bills. Already he had great credit in the Soul Hope cult. It appeared that he spent almost all his time at home, praying and reading and writing a book.

The Soul Hope Fraternity were excited about the book. They had begged him to read it to them. So far he had only read a few pages, consisting mostly of quotations from ancient treatieses on the Prophecies. Nearly every Sunday and Wednesday evening he appeared at the meeting and in a halting and scholarly way lectured on the world and the flesh.

Tonight he spoke polysyllabically of the fact that one Philo Judaeus had been a mere sophist. The cult were none too clear as to what either a Philo Judaeus or a sophist might be, but with heads all nodding in a row they murmured, "You're right, brother! Hallelujah!"

John glided into a sad earnest discourse on his worldly brother Jasper, and informed them of his struggles with Jasper's itch for money. By his request the fraternity prayed for Jasper.

The meeting was over at nine. John shook hands all round with the elders of the congregation, sigh-

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ing, "Fine meeting tonight, wasn't it? Such a free outpouring of the Spirit!" He welcomed a new member, a servant girl just come from Seattle. Carrying his groceries and the bottle of ink he poked down the stairs from the hall at seven minutes after nine.

At sixteen minutes after nine John was stripping off his brown wig and the funereal clothes in his bedroom. At twenty-eight after, John Holt had become Jasper Holt, the capable teller of the Lumber National Bank.

Jasper Holt left the light burning in his brother's bedroom. He rushed downstairs, tried the fastening of the front door, bolted it, made sure that all the windows were fastened, picked up the bundle of groceries and the pile of candies that he had removed from the booklike candy boxes, blew out the light in the living room and ran down the willow walk to his car. He threw the groceries and candy into it, backed the car out as though he was accustomed to backing in this bough-scattered yard, and drove along the lonely road at the rear.

When he was passing a swamp he reached down, picked up the bundle of candies, and steering with one hand removed the wrapping paper with the other hand and hurled out the candies. They showered among the weeds beside the road. The paper which had contained the candies, and upon which was printed the name of the Parthenon Confectionery Store, Jasper tucked into his pocket. He took the groceries item by item from the labeled bag containing them, thrust that bag also into his pocket, and laid the groceries on the seat beside him.

On the way from Rosebank to the center of the city of Vernon he again turned off the main avenue and halted at a goat-infested shack occupied by a crippled Norwegian. He sounded the horn. The Norwegian's grandson ran out.

"Here's a little more grub for you," bawled Jasper.

"God bless you, sir. I don't know what we'd do if it wasn't for you!" cried the old Norwegian from the door.

But Jasper did not wait for gratitude. He merely shouted, "Bring you some more in a couple of days," as he started away.

At a quarter past ten he drove up to the hall that housed the latest interest in Vernon society—The Community Theater. The Boulevard Set, the "best people in town," belonged to the Community Theater Association, and the leader of it was the daughter of the general manager of the railroad. As a well-bred bachelor Jasper Holt was welcome among them, despite the fact that no one knew much about him except that he was a good bank teller and had been born in England.

But as an actor he was not mere-

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ly welcome: he was the best amateur actor in Vernon. His placid face could narrow with tragic emotion or puff out with comedy, his placid manner concealed a dynamo of emotion. Unlike most amateur actors he did not try to act—he became the thing itself. He forgot Jasper Holt and turned into a vagrant or a judge, a Bernard Shaw thought, a Lord Dunsany symbol, a Noel Coward man-about-town.

The other one-act plays of the next program of the Community Theater had already been rehearsed. The cast of the play in which Jasper was to star were all waiting for him. So were the ladies responsible for the staging. They wanted his advice about the blue curtain for the stage window, about the baby-spot that was out of order, about the higher interpretation of the role of the page in the piece—a role consisting of only two lines, but to be played by one of the most popular girls in the younger set.

After the discussions, and a most violent quarrel between two members of the play-reading committee, the rehearsal was called. Jasper Holt still wore his flannel suit and a wilting carnation; but he was not Jasper; he was the Duc de San Saba, a cynical, gracious, gorgeous old man, easy of gesture, tranquil of voice, shudderingly evil of desire.

"If I could get a few more actors like you!" cried the professional coach.

The rehearsal was over at half-past eleven. Jasper drove his car to the public garage in which he kept it and walked home. There he tore up and burned the wrapping paper bearing the name of the Parthenon Confectionery Store and the labeled bag that had contained the groceries.

The Community Theater plays were given on the following Wednesday. Jasper Holt was highly applauded, and at the party at the Lakeside Country Club, after the play, he danced with the prettiest girls in town. He hadn't much to say to them, but he danced fervently, and about him was a halo of artistic success.

That night his brother John did not appear at the meeting of the Soul Hope Fraternity out in Rosebank.

On Monday, five days later, while he was in conference with the president and the cashier of the Lumber National Bank, Jasper complained of a headache. The next day he telephoned to the president that he would not come down to work—he would stay home and rest his eyes, sleep and get rid of the persistent headache. That was unfortunate, for that very day his twin brother John made one of his frequent trips into Vernon and called at the bank.

The president had seen John only once before, and by a coincidence it had happened on this occasion also that Jasper had been absent—had been out of town. The

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president invited John into his private office.

"Your brother is at home—poor fellow has a bad headache. Hope he gets over it. We think a great deal of him here. You ought to be proud of him. Will you have a smoke?"

As he spoke the president looked John over. Once or twice when Jasper and the president had been out at lunch, Jasper had spoken of the remarkable resemblance between himself and his twin brother. But the president told himself that he didn't really see much resemblance. The features of the two were alike, but John's expression of chronic spiritual indigestion, his unfriendly manner, and his hair—unkempt and lifeless brown, where Jasper's was sleekly black about a shiny bald spot—made the president dislike John as much as he liked Jasper.

And now John was replying, "No, I do not smoke. I can't understand how a man can soil the temple with drugs. I suppose I ought to be glad to hear you praise poor Jasper, but I am more concerned with his lack of respect for the things of the spirit. He sometimes comes to see me at Rosebank and I argue with him, but somehow I can't make him see his errors. And his flippant ways——!

"We don't think he's flippant. We think he's a pretty steady worker."

"But he's play-acting! And reading love stories! Well, I try to keep in mind the injunction, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' But I am pained to find my own brother giving up immortal promises for mortal amusements. Well, I'll go and call on him. I trust that some day we shall see you at Soul Hope Hall in Rosebank. Good day, sir."

Turning back to his work, the president grumbled, "I am going to tell Jasper that the best compliment I can hand him is that he is not like his brother."

And on the following day, another Wednesday, when Jasper reappeared at the bank, the president did make this jesting comparison, and Jasper sighed, "Oh, John is really a good fellow, but he's always gone in for metaphysics and Oriental mysticism and Lord knows what, till he's kind of lost in the fog. But he's a lot better than I am. When I murder my landlady—or say, when I rob the bank, Chief—you go get John, and I bet you the best lunch in town that he'll do his best to bring me to justice. That's how square he is!"

"Square, yes—corners just sticking out! Well, when you do rob us, Jasper, I'll look up John. But try to keep from robbing us as long as you can. I'd hate to have to associate with a religious detective in a boiled shirt!"

Both men laughed, and Jasper went back to his cage. His head continued to hurt, he admitted. The president advised him to lay off for a week. He didn't want to, he said.

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With the new munition industries due to the war in Europe there was much increase in factory pay rolls, and Jasper took charge of them.

"Better take a week off than get ill," argued the president late that afternoon.

Jasper did let himself be persuaded to go away for at least a week-end. He would run up north to Wakamin Lake the coming Friday, he said; he would get in some black-bass fishing, and be back on Monday or Tuesday.

Before he went he would make up the pay rolls for the Saturday payments and turn them over to the other teller. The president thanked him for his faithfulness, and as was his not infrequent custom, invited Jasper to his house for the evening of the next day—Thursday.

That Wednesday evening Jasper's brother John appeared at the Soul Hope meeting in Rosebank. When he had gone home and magically turned back into Jasper, this Jasper did not return the wig and garments of John to the bureau but packed them in a suitcase, took the suitcase to his room in Vernon and locked it in his wardrobe.

Jasper was amiable at dinner at the president's house on Thursday, but he was rather silent, and as his head still throbbed he left the house early—at nine thirty. Sedately carrying his gray silk gloves in one hand and pompously swinging his stick with the other, he walked from the president's house on the fashionable boulevard back to the center of Vernon. He entered the public garage in which he stored his car. He commented to the night attendant, "Head aches. Guess I'll take the 'bus out and get some fresh air."

He drove away at not more than twenty-five miles an hour, heading south. When he had reached the outskirts of the city he speeded up to a consistent thirty-five miles an hour. He settled down in his seat with the unmoving steadiness of the long-distance driver, his body quiet except for the tiny subtle movements of his foot on the accelerator, of his hand on the steering wheel—his right hand across the wheel, holding it at the top, his left elbow resting easily on the cushioned edge of his seat and his left hand merely touching the wheel.

He drove down in that southern direction for fifteen miles—almost to the town of Wanagoochie. Then by a rather poor side road he turned sharply to the north and west, and making a huge circle about the city drove toward the town of St. Clair. The suburb of Rosebank, in which his brother John lived, is also north of Vernon. These directions were of some importance to him; Wanagoochie eighteen miles south of the mother city of Vernon; Rosebank, on the other hand, eight miles north of Vernon, and St. Clair twenty miles north—about as far

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north of Vernon as Wanagoochie is south.

On his way to St. Clair, at a point that was only two miles from Rosebank, Jasper ran the car off the main road into a grove of oaks and maples and stopped it on a long-unused woodland road. He stiffly got out and walked through the woods up a rise of ground to a cliff overlooking a swampy lake. The gravelly farther bank of the cliff rose perpendicularly from the edge of the water.

In that wan light distilled by stars and the earth he made out the reedy expanse of the lake. It was so muddy, so tangled with sedge grass that it was never used for swimming, and as its inhabitants were only slimy bullheads, few people ever tried to fish there. Jasper stood reflective. He was remembering the story of the farmer's team which had run away, dashed over this cliff, and sunk out of sight in the mud bottom of the lake.

Swishing his stick he outlined an imaginary road from the top of the cliff back to the sheltered place where his car was standing. Once he hacked away with a large pocketknife a mass of knotted hazel bushes which blocked that projected road. When he had traced the road to his car he smiled.

He walked to the edge of the woods and looked up and down the main highway. A car was approaching. He waited till it had passed, ran back to his own car, backed it out on the highway, and went on his northward course toward St. Clair, driving about thirty-five miles an hour.

On the edge of St. Clair he halted, took out his kit of tools, unscrewed a spark plug, and sharply tapping the plug on the engine block, deliberately cracked the porcelain jacket. He screwed the plug in again and started the car. It bucked and spit, missing on one cylinder, with the short-circuited plug.

"I guess there must be something wrong with the ignition," he said cheerfully.

He managed to run the car into a garage in St. Clair. There was no one in the garage save the night washer who was busy over a limousine with sponge and hose.

"Got a night repair man here?" asked Jasper.

"No, sir; guess you'll have to leave it till morning."

"Hang it! Something gone wrong with the carburetor or the ignition. Well, I'll have to leave it then. Tell him—say, will you be here in the morning when the repair man comes on?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, tell him I must have the car by tomorrow noon. No, say by tomorrow at nine. Now, don't forget. This will help your memory."

He gave a quarter to the man who grinned and as he tied a storage tag on the car inquired, "Name?"

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"Uh—my name? Oh, Hanson. Remember now, ready about nine tomorrow."

Jasper walked to the railroad station. It was ten minutes of one. Jasper did not ask about the next train into Vernon. Apparently he knew that there was a train stopping here at St. Clair at 1:37. He did not sit in the waiting room but in the darkness outside, on a truck behind the baggage room.

When the train came in he slipped into the last seat of the last car, and with his soft hat over his eyes either slept or appeared to sleep. When he reached Vernon he got off and came to the garage in which he regularly kept his car. He stepped inside. The night attendant was drowsing in a large wooden chair tilted back against the wall in the narrow runway which formed the entrance to the garage.

Jasper jovially shouted to the attendant, "Certainly ran into some hard luck. Ignition went wrong—I guess it was the ignition. Had to leave the car down at Wanagoochie."

"Yuh, hard luck, all right," assented the attendant.

"Yump. So I left it at Wanagoochie," Jasper emphasized as he passed on.

He had been inexact in this statement. It was not at Wanagoochie, which is south, but at St. Clair, which is north, that he had left his car.

He returned to his boarding house, slept beautifully, hummed in his morning shower bath. Yet at breakfast he complained of his continuous headache and announced that he was going up north to Wakamin to get in some bass fishing and rest his eyes. His landlady urged him to go.

"Anything I can do to help you get away!" she queried.

"No, thanks. I'm just taking a couple of suitcases, with some old clothes and some fishing tackle. Fact, I have 'em all packed already. I'll probably take the noon train north if I can get away from the bank. Pretty busy now, with these pay rolls for the factories that have war contracts for the Allies. What's it say in the paper this morning?"

Jasper arrived at the bank, carrying the two suitcases and a neat, polite, rolled silk umbrella, the silver top of which was engraved with his name. The doorman, who was also the bank guard, helped him to carry the suitcases inside.

"Careful of that bag. Got my fishing tackle in it," said Jasper to the doorman, apropos of one of the suitcases which was heavy but apparently not packed full. "Well, I think I'll run up to Wakamin today and catch a few bass."

"Wish I could go along, sir. How is the head this morning? Does it still ache?" asked the doorman.

"Rather better, but my eyes still feel pretty rocky. Guess I've been using them too much. Say, Connors, I'll try to catch the train north

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at eleven-seven. Better have a taxi-cab here for me at eleven. Or no; I'll let you know a little before eleven. Try to catch the eleven-seven north, for Wakamin."

"Very well, sir."

The president, the cashier, the chief clerk—all asked Jasper how he felt; and to all of them he repeated the statements that he had been using his eyes too much and that he would catch a few bass at Wakamin.

The other paying teller, from his cage next to that of Jasper, called heartily through the steel netting, "Pretty soft for some people! You wait, I'm going to have hay fever this summer and I'll go fishing for a month!"

Jasper placed the two suitcases and the umbrella in his cage, and leaving the other teller to pay out current money he himself made up the pay rolls for the next day—Saturday. He casually went into the vault—a narrow, unimpressive, unaired cell with a hard linoleum floor, one unshaded electric bulb, and a back wall composed entirely of steel doors of safes, all painted a sickly blue, very unimpressive, but guarding several millions of dollars in cash and securities. The upper doors, hung on large steel arms and each provided with two dials, could be opened only by two officers of the bank, each knowing one of the two combinations. Below these were smaller doors, one of which Jasper could open, as teller. It was the door of an insignificant steel box, which contained $117,000 in bills and $4000 in gold and silver.

Jasper passed back and forth, carrying bundles of currency. In his cage he was working less than three feet from the other teller. Mechanically, unobtrusively, Jasper counted out bills to amounts agreeing with the items on a typed schedule of the pay rolls. Apparently his eyes never lifted from his counting and from the typed schedule which lay before him. The bundles of bills he made into packages, fastening each with a paper band. Each bundle he seemed to drop into a small black leather bag which he held beside him. But he did not actually drop the money into these pay-roll bags.

Both the suitcases at his feet were closed and presumably fastened, but one was not fastened. And though it was heavy it contained nothing but a lump of pig iron. From time to time Jasper's hand, holding a bundle of bills, dropped to his side. With a slight movement of his foot he opened that suitcase and the bills slipped from his hand down into it.

The bottom part of the cage was a solid sheet of stamped steel and from the front of the bank no one could see this suspicious gesture. The other teller could have seen it, but Jasper dropped the bills only when the other teller was busy talking to a customer or when his back

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was turned. In order to delay for such a favorable moment Jasper frequently counted packages of bills twice, rubbing his eyes as though they hurt him.

After each of these secret disposals of packages of bills Jasper made much of dropping into the pay-roll bags the rolls of coin for which the schedule called. It was while he was tossing these blue-wrapped cylinders of coin into the bags that he would chat with the other teller. Then he would lock up the bags and gravely place them at one side.

Jasper was so slow in making up the pay rolls that it was five minutes of eleven before he finished. He called the doorman to the cage and suggested, "Better call my taxi now."

He still had one bag to fill. He could plainly be seen dropping packages of money into it, while he instructed the assistant teller, "I'll stick all the bags in my safe and you can transfer them to yours. Be sure to lock my safe. Lord, I better hurry or I'll miss my train! Be back Tuesday morning, at latest. So long; take care yourself."

He hastened to pile the pay-roll bags into his safe in the vault. The safe was almost filled with them. And except for the last one not one of the bags contained anything except a few rolls of coin. Though he had told the other teller to lock his safe, he himself twirled the combination—which was thoughtless of him, as the assistant teller would now have to wait and get the president to unlock it.

He picked up his umbrella and two suitcases, bending over one of the cases for not more than ten seconds. Waving goodbye to the cashier at his desk down front and hurrying so fast that the doorman did not have a chance to help him carry the suitcases, he rushed through the bank, through the door, into the waiting taxicab, and loudly enough for the doorman to hear he cried to the driver, "M. & D. Station."

At the M. & D. R. R. Station, refusing offers of redcaps to carry his bags, he bought a ticket for Wakamin, which is a lake resort town one hundred and forty miles northwest of Vernon, hence one hundred and twenty beyond St. Clair. He had just time to get aboard the eleven-seven train. He did not take a Pullman chair, but sat in a day coach near the rear door. He unscrewed the silver top of his umbrella, on which was engraved his name, and dropped it into his pocket.

When the train reached St. Clair, Jasper strolled out to the vestibule, carrying the suitcases but leaving the topless umbrella behind. His face was blank, uninterested. As the train started he dropped down on the station platform and gravely walked away. For a second the light of adventure crossed his face, and vanished.

At the garage at which he had

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left his car the evening before he asked, "Did you get my car fixed —Mercury roadster, ignition on the bum?"

"Nope! Couple of jobs ahead of it. Haven't had time to touch it yet. Ought to get at it early this afternoon."

Jasper curled his tongue round his lips in startled vexation. He dropped his suitcases on the floor of the garage and stood thinking, his bent forefinger against his lower lip.

Then: "Well, I guess I can get her to go—sorry—can't wait—got to make the next town," he grumbled.

"Lot of you traveling salesmen making our territory by motor now, Mr. Hanson," said the foreman civilly, glancing at the storage check on Jasper's car.

"Yep. I can make a good many more than I could by train."

He paid for overnight storage without complaining, though since his car had not been repaired this charge was unjust. In fact, he was altogether prosaic and inconspicuous. He thrust the suitcases into the car and drove away, the motor spitting. At another garage he bought another spark plug and screwed it in. When he went on, the motor had ceased spitting.

He drove out of St. Clair, back in the direction of Vernon—and of Rosebank where his "brother" lived. He ran the car into that thick grove of oaks and maples only two miles from Rosebank, where he had paced off an imaginary road to the cliff overhanging the reedy lake.

He parked his car in a grassy space beside the abandoned woodland road. He laid a light robe over the suitcases. From beneath the seat he took a can of deviled chicken, a box of biscuits, a canister of tea, a folding cooking kit and a spirit lamp. These he spread on the grass —a picnic lunch.

He sat beside that lunch from seven minutes past one in the afternoon till dark. Once in a while he made a pretense of eating. He fetched water from the brook, made tea, opened the box of biscuits and the can of chicken. But mostly he sat still and smoked cigarette after cigarette.

At dusk Jasper finished a cigarette down to the tip, crushed out the light, and made the cryptic remark: "That's probably Jasper Holt's last smoke. I don't suppose you can smoke, John—damn you!"

He hid the two suitcases in the bushes, piled the remains of the lunch into the car, took down the top of the car, and crept down to the main road. No one was in sight. He returned. He snatched a hammer and a chisel from his tool kit and with a few savage cracks so defaced the number of the car stamped on the engine block that it could not be made out.

He removed the license plates and placed them beside the suitcases. Then, when there was just

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enough light to see the bushes as cloudy masses, he started the car, drove through the woods and up the incline to the top of the cliff, and halted, leaving the engine running.

Between the car and the edge of the cliff which overhung the lake there was a space of about one hundred and thirty feet, fairly level and covered with straggly red clover. Jasper paced off this distance, returned to the car, took his seat in a nervous, tentative way, and put her into gear, starting on second speed and slamming her into third.

The car bolted toward the edge of the cliff. He instantly swung out on the running board. Standing there, headed directly toward the sharp drop over the cliff, steering with his left hand on the wheel, he shoved the hand throttle up—up—up with his right. He safely leaped down from the running board.

Of itself, the car rushed forward, roaring. It shot over the edge of the cliff. It soared twenty feet out into the air. It turned over and over, with a sickening drop toward the lake. The water splashed up in a tremendous noisy circle. Then silence.

In the twilight the surface of the lake shone like milk. There was no sign of the car on the surface. The concentric rings died away. The lake was secret and sinister and still. "Lord!" ejaculated Jasper, standing on the cliff; then: "Well, they won't find that for a couple of years anyway."

He turned to the suitcases. Squatting beside them he took from one the wig and black garments of John Holt. He stripped, put on the clothes of John, and packed those of Jasper in the bag. With the cases and the license plates he walked toward Rosebank, keeping in various groves of maples and willows till he was within half a mile of the town.

He reached the stone house at the end of the willow walk and sneaked in the back way. He burned Jasper Holt's clothes in the grate, melted down the license plates in the stove, and between two rocks he smashed Jasper's watch and fountain pen into an unpleasant mass of junk, which he dropped into the cistern for rain water. The silver head of the umbrella he scratched with a chisel till the engraved name was indistinguishable.

He unlocked a section of the bookcase and taking a number of packages of bills in denominations of one, five, ten, and twenty dollars from one of the suitcases he packed them into those empty candy boxes which, on the shelves, looked so much like books. As he stored them he counted the bills. They came to $97,535.

The two suitcases were new. There were no distinguishing marks on them. But taking them out to the kitchen he kicked them, rubbed them with lumps of blacking, raveled their edges, and cut

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their sides, till they gave the appearance of having been long and badly used in traveling. He took them upstairs and tossed them up into the low attic.

In his bedroom he undressed calmly. Once he laughed: "I despise those pretentious fools—bank officers and cops. I'm beyond their fool law. No one can catch me—it would take me myself to do that!"

He got into bed. With a vexed "Hang it!" he mused, "I suppose John would pray, no matter how chilly the floor was."

He got out of bed and from the inscrutable Lord of the Universe he sought forgiveness—not for Jasper Holt, but for the denominations that lacked the true faith of Soul Hope Fraternity.

He returned to bed and slept till the middle of the morning, lying with his arms behind his head, a smile on his face.

Thus did Jasper Holt, without the mysterious pangs of death, yet cease to exist, and thus did John Holt come into being not merely as an apparition glimpsed on Sunday and Wednesday evenings but as a being living twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

(*continued on page 109*)

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THE ADVENTURE OF THE STOCKBROKER'S CLARK

by ROBERT L. FISH

THE YEAR '54 WAS ONE OF EXCEPTIONAL ACTIVITY FOR MY FRIEND, MR. Schlock Homes. During the early months of the year he had been busy across the channel, for it was only through his efforts that the tulip crop of Holland was saved from being smuggled out of that country. This particular case, which earned for Homes the Hague 5-Star Man of Distinction Award, was given wide publicity at the time, and I find the details recorded in my case-book as The Adventure of the Dutch Bulb-Snatchers.

Homes's return in the spring immediately found him involved in the odd problem of the footballer who was being kept against his will on a second-rated team—a case I find listed in my notes as The Adventure of the B-Leaguered Goalkeeper. It was also about this period that he was able to be of assistance to Sir Merrivale Lodge's sister, Wisteria; and shortly thereafter he solved the puzzling problem of confused identities at Bedlam Hospital which later became known as The Adventure of the Five Napoleons.

When September arrived, therefore, both Homes and myself felt the need for rest, and arranged to leave our quarters at 221B Bagel Street for a well deserved holiday at Watts, in Middlesex, planning to spend our hours in complete inactivity. But even in this quiet rustic retreat the great detective was not permitted to relax, for it was here that Homes was confronted with a challenge that gave him the opportunity once again to demonstrate his exceptional powers of reasoning. I find the affair in my notes under the title of The Adventure of the Stockbroker's Clark.

We had no sooner settled in our rooms at the Watts New Hotel when a series of loud, jarring explosions drew us in haste to the open window, where we were in time to observe one of the new horseless carriages grind to a stop at the hotel doorway. The driver emerged, and after studying the swinging sign above the entrance, disappeared from our view into the building.

The expression of distaste on Homes's face clearly indicated his opinion of the mechanical monster in the road below, and with a sad shake

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of his head he prepared to reseat himself, when a sharp rap came at the door and our host the innkeeper ushered in a large, florid gentleman who threw off his goggles and duster, and, uninvited, flung himself into a chair before us.

"You like my new Clark-4?" he asked, laughing a bit too loudly. "Best foreign motor car on the market. It cost me a pretty packet, but what of it, I say! Money's to take and to spend, and I take it easily, so I spend it easily!"

He paused as my friend eyed him in icy silence, and then continued, although his geniality appeared a bit more forced.

"Well, Mr. Homes, I finally wormed your present address here out of your housekeeper, Mrs. Essex, although I must admit I had to make up quite a story, since she stupidly refused a bribe. However, I promise that you won't suffer for it financially! I'm a generous man, though people deny it; but I insist on receiving fair value for my brass!

"Now, Mr. Homes, I have a pretty problem for you to solve, but before I propound it, I understand that you pride yourself on your ability to deduce a person's occupation from his appearance, and I would like to wager that you can't guess mine!" Leaning back negligently, he lit a huge cigar, and allowed the match-box to dangle loosely from one hand.

Knowing Homes's dislike for ostentation and braggadocio, I fully expected my friend to eject our unpleasant visitor forthwith, but to my great surprise he studied the man dispassionately for several minutes.

"From the soft condition of your hands, and your apparent prosperity," remarked Homes coldly, his eyes roving over the seated figure as he spoke, "I should judge you to be engaged in commerce of some sort, most probably in the retail end. I note that the match-box you hold advertises the Chez One-Hoss, a well-known night club in Hertford, not far from here, and one which is largely frequented by the more successful agrarians of that area. So I would deduce that the items you handle are primarily intended for use by farmers.

"Your right trouser-leg exhibits two marks, one greasy and deriving, I should imagine, from contact with a thin metal hoop which was some ten inches from the floor; the other shows marks of wood-powder which I can readily recognize as birch, and which appears approximately four inches higher on your trouser-leg.

"The items you sell, therefore, are manufactured of both wood and metal and come in two distinct sizes—one ten inches in height and the other fourteen inches in height. Since a metal watering bucket is

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exactly ten inches high and is rimmed with a hoop, and the standard butter-tub or bucket used by the dairy farmers in this neighbourhood is exactly fourteen inches high and made of birch, I should say it is fairly easy to deduce your occupation. You, sir, are undoubtedly the operator of a bucket-shop!"

"Well, now, Mr. Homes," said our visitor, chuckling heartily. "I guess that with your reputation you can afford a miss now and then, and you were certainly bowled clean on me! These marks on my trouser-leg are the result of fixing my Clark-4 myself, for I don't allow any fool of a mechanic to tamper with my machine, no, sir! An operator of a bucket-shop! Ha, ha! You couldn't be further off! As a matter of fact, I happen to be a stockbroker, and it is in connection with this that I wish to employ your services.

"My name, Mr. Homes, is Jonathan Fast, and I operate the largest brokerage firm in the entire Empire devoted exclusively to the sale of stocks and bonds to small investors. I had an associate, named Peter Luce, but he proved to be too soft in his dealings with clients. I was therefore forced to squeeze—that is to say, buy him out—although I still retain his name in the firm, out of respect for his memory, as well as for the friends he had among the poor.

"Since my firm specializes in dealing with the uninitiate in the investment business, we are often approached by people who are either illiterate, or uneducated, or both; but we never refuse an order no matter how small, and always push our firm's motto, which is: *Don't hide your money in a shoe—that's obtuse; we will handle it for you—Fast & Luce.*

"As a result of this policy, which I might mention has been singularly successful throughout the years, we are accustomed to receive messages and orders from all parts of the world, and many are so poorly written that at times it has been quite difficult to decipher them. However, since one never knows to-day who can or cannot afford to dabble in stocks, we go to extraordinary lengths to interpret all messages, even employing translators when necessary.

"To-day, however, I received a communication which is in plain English, but which frankly I am unable to understand. Our experts at the office have done their best to interpret it but without success. Knowing your reputation for solving puzzles of this nature, I therefore went to some trouble to locate you, and I should like you to decipher this for me as quickly as possible."

He withdrew from his pocket a wrinkled sheet of paper and laid it on the table before us. It was printed in crude block letters on a torn

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and dirty sheet of wrapping paper, and I reproduce it below for the reader:

At the appearance of this strange letter Homes's boredom disappeared at once. Handling the wrinkled missive with the greatest of care he bore it to the window and studied it carefully in the fading afternoon light. Then, to my amazement, he bent his head over the paper and carefully smelled it! Then, nodding his head as if in verification of some private conclusion, he turned to our visitor.

"The envelope!" he demanded, his voice tight.

"There was no envelope. The message was slipped under the door of my office precisely as you see it."

Holmes took this information with ill-concealed disappointment, but when he again turned to face our visitor he was once more his old, calm self. "Well, Mr. Fast," he said shortly, "if I may retain this paper for a few days I have no doubt but that I shall be able to decipher it. It promises to be a most interesting problem, and since I am supposedly on holiday I see no reason not to give it my full attention. I imagine that your firm is in the London Directory, and as soon as I have news I shall be in touch with you."

"Very well, Mr. Homes," replied our visitor, collecting his driving equipment and consulting a heavy pocket-watch; "but don't waste any more time than is absolutely necessary. Sometimes the crudest messages have resulted in the greatest profit—that is, the greatest opportunity for us to be of service to our clients!"

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When a new series of explosions indicated to us that the Clark-4 had left the hotel doorstep, Homes carefully covered the torn paper with a clean piece of glass to protect it against damage, and then relaxing in an arm-chair, lighted his pipe.

"A most unpleasant character!" he remarked, puffing slowly. "Common politeness forced me to listen to his story, and I fully intended to show him the door as soon as in all decency I could; but once he produced that badly scrawled message I'm afraid I was lost! I can only hope that the secret it contains does not work to the advantage of our Mr. Fast, for I cannot recall a previous client who affected me so disagreeably.

"However, Watney, it never does to tackle a new case at night. Morning wakens the brain as well as the body, and I therefore suggest we relax this evening and come fresh to this on the morrow. The Watts Town Hall to-night has a program of Polish folk-dances; I understand they start with Five Minuets of Latis Knuze, and finish with the famous Oy Gavotte. Should we wish to attend, Watney, I suggest we leave at once, for the country does not keep our city hours, you know!"

The following morning, well rested by ten hours sleep in the fresh Middlesex air and fortified by a huge country breakfast, Homes lighted a cigarette and withdrew the mysterious paper from beneath the glass.

"Well, Watney," he said, his eyes twinkling. "I should like to have your opinion of this strange billet-doux. What are you able to deduce from it?"

I took the crumpled sheet from his hand and scanned it closely, attempting to adopt the studious mien of my friend when he was involved in the analysis of some abstruse problem, although in truth I could see little there to give us an important lead.

"Well, Homes," I answered slowly, "it is clear that this was written by a person of great personal slovenliness, for you will note that in handling it he was careless enough to leave his hand-print, and a dirty one at that. The poverty of the writer is also apparent from the fact that he delivered it in person rather than spend thruppence on a postage stamp. However, I must confess that the significance of the intended message eludes me completely."

Homes laughed and retrieved the note from my outstretched fingers. "Not bad, Watney," he chuckled, "but I was requesting information regarding the message itself, for this also eludes me at the moment. As to the writer, that worthy is easily described, for it should be obvious that this note was written by a midget suffering from amnesia, who

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lives in Soho, most probably in Greek Street, and who is involved, or at least has some connection with the publishing trade."

I stared at my friend in utter astonishment, for I could see nothing in the torn sheet which could possibly lead to this startling statement. "Homes!" I ejaculated. "How can you possibly arrive at these conclusions on the basis of this paper?"

"Later, Watney," he replied, arising with a smile and removing his dressing gown. "At the moment I am not prepared to satisfy your curiosity, for my own has only been whetted until now. I fear that I must interrupt my holiday and travel to town, for it is there the answer lies. If you will be so kind, Watney, as to arrange a trap to take me to the station, I shall change and be ready in a moment."

I had the trap at the door when he descended, and I fear that my astonishment at his appearance caused me to gape, for he was dressed in old clothes of solid black, with white shirt and string tie, and he had adopted the straggling moustache and black velour hat of the bohemian.

"Strangers to Soho, Watney, do not garner information easily," he said, smiling broadly at my puzzlement. "One must appear to be of the neighbourhood in order to elicit relevant data from the denizens of that queer district. I shall plan to return on the 5:12, should you care to meet me, and we can spend the evening discussing my findings."

I spent the balance of the day exploring the historical inns and well equipped public-rooms of the little town, but still I managed to be on hand at the station when Homes's train came puffing to a halt alongside the rustic platform. I fully expected my friend to descend with that broad smile which I knew indicated the successful conclusion of a particularly troublesome problem, but when the train ground to a stop, Homes stepped down with a worried frown on his face and scarcely acknowledged my greeting.

"I am afraid that my efforts to-day were not crowned with success," he said bitterly, as our trap bore us to the hotel. "It appears that I shall have to decipher the cryptic message after all, and with no help from the writer!"

"You were unable to locate him?"

"Oh, that was no problem—I located him easily enough. But he denies having written the missive! A further proof, if one were needed, of his amnesia, but certainly of no aid to us in solving the problem. No, I fear that further study of the mysterious paper is indicated."

When we had finished with our dinner, therefore, Homes pulled his

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chair to the table and began brooding over the cryptic note, his briar filling the room with clouds of smoke. Knowing his dislike of interruption in moments like this, I buried myself in a book, but a few moments later Homes slammed his hand on the table and arose.

"It is useless, Watney," he said in great disgust. "I am too tired to concentrate. I suggest a good night's rest, after which I can tackle this again in the morning, fresh and alert." And bidding me good night, he stalked off to his bedroom.

The morning, however, brought no improvement, for I entered our sitting-room to find Homes staring dejectedly out of the window, his long, thin body drooping with weariness, his usually sparkling eyes dull and unseeing.

"Homes!" I cried in alarm, worried by his appearance. "What is the trouble?"

"It was the incident of the dog in the night-time," he replied bitterly.

"The dog in the night-time?" I asked in bewilderment. "But the dog barked all night!"

"Precisely," he said, his voice heavy with exhaustion. "I didn't get a wink of sleep! However, in the course of being kept awake I did get some glimmer of the purpose behind this mysterious message, and since I know I shall not rest until it is solved, I shall return to the city to-day and follow several new leads. Possibly I can snatch a few moments of rest in the train, for my day shall be heavily proscribed. I shall again return on the 5:12, unless I telegraph you otherwise."

It was mid-afternoon, and I was lounging at the door of the public-room of the hotel, waiting to see if their opening hours were in accordance with the law, when a uniformed messenger handed me a telegram from Homes. I ripped it open eagerly and read: MEET ME SIX TO-NIGHT CRASHING BOAR PUB FLEET STREET. CASE SOLVED. BRING NOTE. HOMES.

The Crashing Boar pub in Fleet Street stood well back from the pavement in a little mews running between two huge printing plants. I arrived a few minutes late to find Homes ensconced at a corner table partaking of a whiskey. He called the waiter and ordered a similar drink for me while I seated myself and handed him the torn sheet of paper. Verifying it, he tucked it into his waistcoat and leaned back smiling. I have never ceased to be amazed at the recuperative powers of Schlock Homes, especially when he has reached the successful conclusion of a case; for looking at him now one could never guess that he had spent two days without sleep in pursuit of the answer to this puzzling problem.

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"Well, Watney," said he, smiling broadly, "the solution was before me from the beginning, but I was too much of a fool to see it. I have been developing a tendency lately to look for obscure and hidden meanings in the simplest things, and as a result I often waste time before coming back to the correct path.

"Take this case, for example. As you so cleverly noted when you first saw the note, the message was obviously written by a person of slovenly habits, as witness the hand-print left by a dirty hand. But what you failed to note was the *size* of the hand: clearly it was too small to be that of an adult, and yet a child could not have been responsible for the written words. Ergo, it was written by an adult with a hand the size of a child's—that is, by a midget! The fact that he failed to sign his missive could not have been the result of oversight, since the laborious forming of the block letters showed that he had put much effort into his composition. The only possible reason which I could deduce for this failure to append his name was that at the moment he was unable to recall it—a classic example of amnesia, and not as unusual as we might like to think.

"When I was first handed the note, I was struck by the rather pungent smell that arose from the paper, and being somewhat of an expert on strange odors I was able immediately to identify it as being that of Parmesan cheese, used for the greatest part in the cooking of Sicilian pizza, and encountered to my knowledge only in the Italian restaurants of Soho, Most probably in Greek Street itself!"

"But Homes," I interrupted, "how were you able to deduce the connection with the publishing trade?"

"The hand-print, Watney! It was not ordinary dirt from the street—the most casual examination revealed it to be printer's ink. Shortly before inadvertently leaving that mark upon the paper, the writer had handled fresh newsprint, and some of the ink had come off on his hands."

"A masterful analysis, Homes," I said in admiration, grasping his hand across the table. "Once you have explained it, it all seems so clear and obvious. But the message itself—how were you able to decipher that?"

"Quite by accident, as a matter of fact, Watney. Once I had arrived at a description of the writer, I went directly to Greek Street and began to interview various residents. In short order I found myself directed to a corner news-stand, where I encountered the owner, a midget, busily handling journals, which explained the dirty hands. He denied having written the message—which was the final proof of my

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identification, for it showed conclusively his amnesia. Being unable to shake his story, I was forced to return to Watts unsuccessful.

"To-day I visited Greek Street and was determined to revive the failing memory of that poor man. For that purpose I brought with me a small battery-operated hand-buzzer which I stopped and obtained in a fun-shop in Piccadilly. It is a well-known principle that sudden shock works wonders in these cases. I was about to proffer my hand, in which I had concealed this mechanism, when I noticed a magazine on display there, with the name of *Time*. At once the whole thing became crystal-clear!"

Taking the torn sheet from his pocket, Homes spread it on the table before me and read, "'Your Time Is Running Out'—and it means exactly what it says! I immediately taxed our newsdealer with selling magazine subscriptions as a sideline, and he freely admitted that he helped augment his income in this fashion. He continued, however, to deny that he had reminded Mr. Fast that his subscription to *Time* was running out, so I once again offered him my hand, as if in leave-taking. Unfortunately, the fun-shop seems to have mounted the buzzer in an inverted position, and I am afraid that my reactions caused him some suspicion, for he threatened to call a policeman unless I left at once.

"However, his admission was not essential, for I now knew the truth of the matter. As you know, my conviction is that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth!"

"Marvellous, Homes!" I cried enthusiastically. "What do you intend to do now?"

Homes shrugged indifferently. "Actually, nothing," he said, yawning deeply. "There is no need for action that I can see. Obviously the message does not affect Mr. Fast either adversely or otherwise, and if that obnoxious boor is so careless as to allow a magazine subscription to pass the renewal date, I do not consider it my duty to advise him. However, if you feel that our responsibility to a client demands an explanation, you might drop him a line in the morning explaining the steps we have taken, and the results of our investigation.

"And now, Watney, we have interrupted our rest enough with this minor matter. I suggest that since the hour is late, we pass the night in Bagel Street and return to Watts to-morrow to continue our holidays."

The following morning we caught an early train back to our sylvan lodgings in Watts, and as the train passed through the beautiful Middle-

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sex scenery, I unfolded the journal I had purchased at Euston station and carefully scanned the news. Suddenly an article claimed my attention and I began to delve into it with great interest.

"Something in our line, Watney?" came the relaxed voice of my companion. "I see that you appear to be quite impressed by whatever you are reading."

"Nothing criminal; no, Homes," I replied, folding the paper to the article and handing it to him, "but I fear there will be no need for us to give Mr. Fast a report on his query. It appears that as he was cranking his new Clark-4 yesterday, it gave an explosion more violent than usual, and as yet the police have been unable to properly separate the tangled parts of Mr. Fast and his motor car."

"It was bound to happen sooner or later," said Homes, taking the paper from my hand and reading further into the article. "While I hold no brief for Mr. Fast, who was patently offensive, still I would be failing in my duty if I did not express my views on these gasoline-driven monstrosities that are rapidly threatening us all with monoxide poisoning, explosions, and other ills! A letter to the *Times*, if you will, Watney!"

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BEST MYSTERIES OF 1960

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The mystery year of 1960 got off to a grand start with two excellent books in the very first week—a solid performance by an Old Mistress and (even more welcome) a delightfully fresh story by an unknown:

FALSE SCENT, *by Ngaio Marsh* (Little, Brown, $3.75)
STRIKE FOR A KINGDOM, *by Menna Gallie* (Harper, $3.50)

and shortly thereafter an always good professional outdid himself:

SEND ANOTHER HEARSE, *by Harold Q. Masur* (Random, $2.95)

February brought a faultlessly tasteful anthology and a fine collection of curious and macabre stories:

WICKED WOMEN, *edited by Lee Wright* (Pocket Books 1263, 35¢)
KISS KISS, *by Roald Dahl* (Knopf, $3.95)

Also in February came the first of 11 novels by crime's most fertile reporter, John Creasey; best of this incredible output, under 7 names:

GIDEON'S RISK, *by "J. J. Marric"* (Harper, $2.95)

March was the richest single month, bringing us the best of all writers of international intrigue in his top form:

PASSAGE OF ARMS, *by Eric Ambler* (Knopf, $3.95)

a deductive adventure of Hercule Poirot to rank among his best:

CAT AMONG THE PIGEONS, *by Agatha Christie* (Dodd, Mead, $2.95)

an extraordinary suspense chiller of modern witchcraft:

THE DEVIL'S OWN, *by Peter Curtis* (Crime Club, $3.50)

a subtle and distinctive novel of domestic terror:

UNCLE PAUL, *by Celia Fremlin* (Lippincott, $3.75)

and a striking novella by an ironic and unconventional Swiss writer:

TRAPS, *by Friedrich Duerrenmatt* (Knopf, $1.25)

In April came the year's top romance-adventure thriller:

MY BROTHER MICHAEL, *by Mary Stewart* (Mill-Morrow, $3.95)

and in May a volume with two of Maigret's most compelling cases:

VERSUS INSPECTOR MAIGRET, *by Georges Simenon* (Crime Club, $3.50)

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plus two special delights for admirers of intricate formal technique:

THE TRACES OF BRILLHART, *by Herbert Brean* (Harper, $3.50)
DEAD MEN DON'T SKI, *by Patricia Moyes* (Rinehart, $2.95)

Suspense in its purest form was nowhere more taut than in

WATCHER IN THE SHADOWS, *by Geoffrey Household* (Atlantic-Little, Brown, $3.95)

Midsummer was the era of the Macdonalds, each in his way hard to top as a realistic yet sensitive analyst of crime:

THE FERGUSON AFFAIR, *by Ross Macdonald* (Knopf, $3.50)
THE END OF THE NIGHT, *by John D. MacDonald* (Simon & Schuster, $3.50);
THE ONLY GIRL IN THE GAME (Gold Medal s1015, 35¢)

In September a leading English critic more than met his own standards:

THE PROGRESS OF A CRIME, *by Julian Symons* (Harper, $3.50)

one of the smoothest professionals gave a lesson in construction:

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER, *by Patrick Quentin* (Random, $3.50)

and EQ published the first of two invaluable collections from EQMM:

ELLERY QUEEN'S 15TH MYSTERY ANNUAL (Random, $3.95)
ELLERY QUEEN'S 1961 ANTHOLOGY (Davis, $1)

As autumn waned, England sent yet another startling debutant:

LUST FOR INNOCENCE, *by Dianne Doubtfire* (Morrow, $3.50)

and the back files of EQMM provided the year's best book of shorts:

THE DETECTIONS OF DR. SAM: JOHNSON, *by Lillian de la Torre* (Crime Club, $2.95)

And even in December readers were still rewarded, with the last volume of the annual trilogy on the 87th Precinct.

GIVE THE BOYS A GREAT BIG HAND; THE HECKLER; SEE THEM DIE, *by Ed McBain* (Simon & Schuster, $2.95 each)

In related non-fiction, too, the year was a rich one, furnishing us with two model full-length studies of classic murder cases, a splendid memoir by a great specialist in forensic medicine, a useful collection of essays on the art of crime-writing, and two loving and wise companions to the most imperishable of detectives:

HEAVENS KNOWS WHO, *by Christianna Brand* (Scribner's, $3.95)
THE OVERBURY AFFAIR, *by Miriam Allen deFord* (Chilton, $3.50)
CRIME IN GOOD COMPANY, *collected by Michael Gilbert on behalf of the Crime Writers Association* (The Writer, $3.95)
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, *by Michael Harrison* (Fell, $5)
THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, *revised and enlarged, by Vincent Starrett* (University of Chicago, $4.75)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: JAMES HOLT MCGAVRAN

TITLE: *Cat and Mouse*

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Lamborn, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Aunt Gertrude, widow of the legendary auto tycoon, was something of a legend herself, and when she traveled it was front-page news. Only her grandnephew knew that this trip was scheduled to be her farewell flight . . .*

CLAYTON BYRDE ALWAYS DREADED taking Aunt Gertrude to the airport on the grounds that the proceedings there made him part of a public spectacle. Though capable of walking any distance unaided, she always insisted that he engage a wheel chair and push her down the long corridors, preceded by the porter with her bags. The effect was invariably that of a procession, short but impressive, the illusion being heightened by the Lamborn Airport's electric-eye doors which flung open dramatically as if manned by unseen lackeys.

Today it was no different from the countless other times he had seen her to her plane. Heads turned, lines formed automatically while conversation came to a standstill as the queenly old lady passed with her retinue. Her appearance was commanding, her clothes so quietly elegant that they might have been ten years ahead of fashion instead of thirty or more behind. Not that they were old, for every garment was renewed periodically at substantial cost by a dressmaker who still remembered how a lady should dress. Everything was black, of such a rich and utter blackness that it seemed an exciting new color being shown for the first time. Even the veil which swept from the imposing black feathered hat and stretched tightly across her entire face might have been the latest rage from Paris

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instead of a relic from another era.

Only the large, battered suitcase resting securely on her lap seemed out of keeping with her appearance, and that could be forgiven. Surely a woman of such obvious wealth and standing could be expected to carry her most treasured possessions with her.

On impulse, a *Daily Journal* photographer, assigned to get a picture of an arriving Senator, caught the woman and her escort with his camera.

"Sir! You had no right to do that!" Clayton protested. "My aunt abhors publicity."

"My apologies, madam." The newspaper man ignored Clayton and spoke directly to the old lady. "I will destroy the negative if you ask me to, but it is news when Mrs. Ambrose Pendleton travels."

This was true. As the widow of the legendary automobile tycoon, Gertrude Pendleton was something of a legend herself. Worth many millions, she was noted for her charities and her genuine interest in the cultural activities of the city of Lamborn. Now 97, she was seen and heard of less often than formerly, but it was still news when she moved about.

"You may publish the picture," she said graciously. "You have my full permission. In fact, I am happy you took it."

Clayton was startled at this reaction, and worried. So there *was* something different about Aunt Gertrude today. At first he had thought he was imagining it because of his own overwrought state. She seemed more mellow somehow, almost as if she knew, understood, and even approved of what he had done.

"Please hold the picture for tomorrow's paper," she said firmly. "It will be more newsworthy then. My nephew will give you a story to go with it."

She dismissed the reporter with a nod of her queenly head and motioned her grandnephew to continue to the check-in counter. Somehow his feet responded, but at that moment Clayton Byrde was a desperately sick man. His long, undistinguished face had frozen into a look of near idiocy, a fixed smile exposing his large, uneven teeth. He could feel the perspiration forming on his forehead, and even the handles of the wheel chair felt slippery from the sweat of his palms.

So she knew.

Somehow she had guessed what was in that suitcase and to torture him she had insisted on carrying it on her lap, letting the porter go ahead with the other bags. When would she betray him? When would she suddenly call for the police to take the thing out and dump it in a field where it would explode harmlessly?

There was no doubt she knew—hadn't she tipped off the press with the promise of a story?

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Middle-aged schoolteacher blows up 97-year-old aunt—he could see the caption under their picture. *All aboard plane killed. Teacher confesses. Teacher hangs. Teacher commits suicide . . .*

By sheer effort of will, Clayton managed to regain control of himself. Indomitable as she was, even Aunt Gertrude would not knowingly ride through a busy airport with a homemade bomb in her lap —least of all with one of his making, because she would never trust anything he made to go off when it should.

In spite of his high, heady hopes for an inheritance, he did not delude himself that Aunt Gertrude was overly fond of him. She was simply stuck with him as her only living relative—just as he was stuck with her.

How long had Aunt Gertrude been the dominant factor in his family's life? Forty years, he thought—since Greatuncle Ambrose died in Detroit and his widow had come to live with her brother, Clayton's Grandfather Byrde.

Clayton had been only five at the time, but he could still remember going to Union Station with his grandfather to meet Aunt Gertrude. She had wired ahead asking to be met with a wheel chair so she wouldn't have to walk through the crowds. Unladylike, she explained later.

The young Clayton had been impressed at her appearance which, to be honest, had changed but little. A subtle altering of colors was about the only visible indication of the passing of time. Her hair, gray then, was snow-white now. Her teeth had turned from white to yellow, and her skin from pink to gray. She wore no glasses then or now and she carried herself with the same queenly air which still commanded attention and respect.

He could remember the subdued excitement of having millions of dollars come home to roost in the big front bedroom. Aunt Gertrude was fifty-seven then and not robust, so hopes were high. They turned out to be unfounded. Grandmother Byrde was the first to get tired of waiting, but Grandfather hopefully wheeled his sister through Union Station for some years before he gave out.

Then Clayton's parents had taken over the long vigil, secretly relieved that the money would now come to them direct without being squandered by the old folks. In time they too decided it was not worth the wait, and five years ago both quietly gave up within six months of each other.

Clayton and his unmarried sister Janice gladly took up the torch from their failing hands and, holding it high, became the third generation to wait for Aunt Gertrude's millions. Still untouched, the millions gloated secretly, liable to only one inheritance tax.

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"Clayton!" Aunt Gertrude spoke sharply. "Where are you going? We've already passed our window."

"Sorry, Aunt Gertrude," he apologized, coming back to the horrible reality of the moment.

He spun her around so sharply that she had to cling to the suitcase with all her strength to keep from dropping it.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" she demanded. "You act like you were a million miles away."

"I'm sorry," he said again. "I guess I was woolgathering."

"Maybe if you hadn't gathered so much wool you would have been principal of the High School by now."

Clayton cringed, but the sharpness of her voice served to remind him that what he was doing should have been done long ago. Even if the thing blew up this very instant, he would be no worse off than he had always been.

"Here, Clayton," she ordered, handing him her ticket. "Check this and get the baggage weighed."

The porter had already placed the bags on the scales. Clayton paid him off and presented the ticket to the clerk. Seeing that it was Mrs. Ambrose Pendleton's luggage, he passed everything through, making no comment on the obviously overweight case on the old lady's lap.

"Sorry to tell you that the plane is almost an hour late," the clerk explained. "Bad weather to the west of us."

It just wasn't Clayton's day. If the plane was an hour late, it could just as easily be two hours behind schedule. He could feel the gooseflesh crawling up his spine. Instead of exploding over the mountains east of Pittsburgh, the bomb might go off right here in Lamborn Airport while he sat twiddling his thumbs and trying to make conversation with Aunt Gertrude.

The bomb was set to blow up at 3 o'clock and it was 1:30 already. Even without further delay, there was almost no time-margin of safety. And if the plane was much later, he had no choice other than to wait and be blown up himself.

"Clayton!" Aunt Gertrude's voice seemed to come from far away. "What did the man say? I've asked you three times and you just keep standing there."

"I—I'm sorry," he said faintly. "The plane is late. We have nearly an hour to wait."

"Is that a major tragedy? Am I that hard to talk to?"

"No, no, of course not."

He began to wheel her aimlessly back through the corridor.

"May I get you a cup of coffee?" he asked as they approached a lunch counter. He was surprised to find his voice operating quite normally.

"No, thank you, Clayton."

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A lady, of course, was never seen eating or drinking in public.

"Would you mind if I have one?" he asked. "I feel faint. I'll leave you over by the window where you can watch the planes."

Surprisingly enough, she agreed. He simply had to get away for a few minutes. No human being on earth except Aunt Gertrude could possibly endure the strain of conversing for an hour with a live bomb on her lap.

"I'll pick up a magazine for you, too," he promised. "Atlantic or Harper's?"

She indicated her choice so naturally that Clayton began to feel that everything would be all right after all. She couldn't let him buy her a magazine if she expected to go to police headquarters and prefer charges against him. Or could she? He shuddered and even the hot coffee could not dispel the chill that entered his body.

The whole thing had seemed so logical when he first thought of it. Of course, he never would have done it if Janice hadn't died. So tragically, so suddenly it had happened, and for no reason that anyone could ever explain to his satisfaction. Aunt Gertrude had tried. So had the doctor, the preacher, and even the treacherous Mr. Banks, Janice's erstwhile fiancé.

When their parents died, Janice and Clayton had willingly assumed what they called full responsibility for Aunt Gertrude. This certainly did not involve any financial liability, or even any physical care, because she was home for such short periods of time. Eight or ten months of each year she spent in travel, visiting her amazingly large circle of friends all over the globe, or at Hightower, her own home in the Poconos. Even when she was with them, she enjoyed unfailing good health, so truly remarkable that no one had ever known her to consult a doctor.

Their whole lives were devoted to pleasing her, for no position Clayton could aspire to, no marriage Janice might make, could ever prove half as profitable as being named Aunt Gertrude's heirs. Both Clayton and Janice believed they had remained single from a sense of duty, a sacrifice which was not only imaginary but totally uncalled for. It was also totally unappreciated, for Aunt Gertrude couldn't have cared less whether they were single or married—any more than she cared whether or not they blindly agreed with her every time she opened her mouth.

Somehow the years went their dull way, lightened only by the wonderful dreams of a rosy future.

"Once Aunt Gertrude is gone, we will really live," Janice used to moon over their prospects. "Then people will give us the respect they should. We will show everyone, won't we, Clayton?"

"We'll see some changes down at the school, too," he promised. "I

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can think of a lot of things that need improving, including some of the personnel."

In one of his many pleasant fantasies of the period Clayton liked to imagine the school board calling him in and asking him to take charge.

"I would like to give something to the Church," Janice would always add. "Maybe a new altar cloth or a Bible for the lectern."

"We'll insist on a new minister first, Janice. They will listen to us then."

"Of course. And Mr. Banks and I will get married maybe. With that much money there will be plenty of people willing to give him a job worthy of his ability."

Janice and Mr. Banks had been engaged for almost 20 years, ever since he started courting her a decent interval after his first wife's death. She had been ill a long time and it took him several years to pay off the obligations her final sickness had incurred. Then Mr. Bank's mother took to her bed and he had to nurse her for a decade and eventually bury her. When at last he was out of debt and ready to marry, Janice decided to wait until Aunt Gertrude passed on.

Unfortunately, Mr. Banks decided not to wait any longer and quite suddenly married his landlady whose house was paid for and who had no relatives, young or old, sick or well. Janice collapsed on hearing the news and succumbed three weeks later of humiliation.

"Shameful! Absolutely shameful!" Clayton wept to Aunt Gertrude after the funeral. "She gave him the best years of her life."

"Nonsense. She never gave him a thing. Janice died because she didn't have the gumption to live. Living is a matter of will."

"But—but she had so much to look forward to!" Clayton protested. "She was planning to get married."

"She had no intention of getting married. Ever." Aunt Gertrude shook her white head to emphasize her point. "Janice was afraid of life, so she left it."

Clayton blinked in disbelief.

"You can't mean that? You mean she just quit living?"

"Exactly. You and Janice have always thought that I kept on living just to spite you, didn't you?"

Clayton squirmed. It was too close to the truth to be denied convincingly.

"I'm alive because I choose to be alive," Aunt Gertrude said firmly. "And when I get tired of being alive, I'll go to bed one night and not get up in the morning. I've read a lot on the subject and thought about it a great deal. I believe that if the Good Lord gave us the will to make every other decision, He certainly gave us this most important one of all. Living is a matter of choice."

"You—you don't mean suicide?" Clayton gulped.

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"God forbid! Of course not! I mean the will to live or not to live. Janice didn't have it. I do."

It was Janice's death, followed by this conversation, which convinced Clayton that Aunt Gertrude would have to go. He was now forty-five and Janice had been forty-seven, and for forty of those years they had been waiting for their inheritance, just as their parents and grandparents had waited before them. Already Aunt Gertrude had buried two generations and now she was starting on the third. It was impossible for him to outlive her. With that strong will of hers, she would in time lay Clayton away and that would be the end of the Byrde family's hopes for wealth; it would, indeed, be the end of the family.

Once the thought occurred to him, it rapidly became an obsession. With Aunt Gertrude out of the way, he would marry and bring a whole new generation into the world. He would make new friends, become a leader in the community admired and respected by all for his wealth and good works. He would be envied for the beauty of his wife, the brilliance of the parties he gave, the intelligence of his children. He would adopt Aunt Gertrude's philosophy and will himself to live on and on, basking in the devotion of his grandchildren and even great-grandchildren.

A bomb seemed the most logical way of dispatching Aunt Gertrude. He hated violence of any kind, but if he were not present when it happened, it would seem as if someone else had done it. The way Aunt Gertrude flew to every part of the country whenever she felt like going, it would be child's play to plant a bomb in her luggage which he always helped her pack.

Most important of all was the ease with which he could construct such a device. As a physics teacher he knew all about these matters, and materials from the High-School chemistry and physics laboratories were his for the taking.

Unfortunately, Aunt Gertrude showed no inclination to take a trip. He had the thing made and ready to install in her suitcase for months during which she made no move to leave. She stayed so long that he began to wonder, a little hopefully, if perhaps she were beginning to fail.

The truth was that she was worried about him, sensing that Janice's death had hit him harder than he realized. She tried to make up for it by taking him to every concert, play, or lecture that was offered in Lamborn during the winter season. She gave up most of her own serious reading to sit with him and watch television, and entertainment medium she abhorred. She even went to special pains to prepare delicacies which she knew he liked. Ordinarily, Clayton did the cooking, but Aunt Gertrude dusted off long forgotten cook-

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books and tried to tempt his appetite.

"I'm worried about you, Clayton," she told him one night as they had after-dinner coffee in the living room. "You don't seem the same since Janice died."

"I'm all right. It did affect me badly because it made me realize that after you are gone I shall be quite alone."

"No, you won't Clayton. I should have told you before. I've made special arrangements for you."

Clayton's pulse quickened and his face lit momentarily with childish anticipation. Now, at last, she was going to reveal the terms of her will. He managed to relax his features into their customary fawning expression.

"It won't be for a long time, I hope," he said lugubriously. "Not with that wonderful will power of yours."

"I wish you had some of it," she snapped. "But never mind that."

She told him then about her plans. The original millions were closer to ten now, and far too much for one individual to inherit —especially a bachelor with no immediate prospects of marriage.

"Whatever you think is right," he agreed passively. "I just hate to think about you ever leaving."

She didn't bother to answer, knowing that in Clayton's book she was expendable.

"Aside from minor bequests, I am leaving my entire fortune to Antrim College," she announced, "with the provision that they create a Chair of Physics for you with a stipend of five thousand dollars a year."

As carefully schooled as he was in suppressing his emotions, even Clayton Byrde could not keep his face from showing his disappointment. He rallied almost at once, with assurances of his eternal gratitude, but his own will to live was at its lowest ebb. Aunt Gertrude was not only leaving her millions to that jerkwater college but was bequeathing him along with it! Like a piece of property, he thought, and at a salary lower than the one he now earned at Lamborn High School.

"You'll have standing and prestige," she reminded him. "A full professorship. And, of course, a place on the Board of Trustees."

He was somewhat mollified, then mildly enthusiastic, when she finished by saying casually that he was the sole beneficiary of her life insurance policies of a hundred thousand or so.

"Enough to travel a little," she told him, "and not have to depend entirely on your salary at Antrim."

It was a bitter disappointment but there was nothing in the world he could do about it—except get his hands on the hundred thousand as fast as he could. Waiting was out of the question when he considered how far patience had got Grandfather and Grandmother Byrde,

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Father and Mother, and finally Janice.

Then, quite suddenly, Aunt Gertrude announced that she was going on a trip. Not to Florida, California, the Orient, Europe, Alaska, or even New York City. She was planning to visit Hightower, the family farm on which she had been born and raised so long ago. For sentimental reasons she had bought it, restored it, and spent part of each year there.

"But Hightower!" Clayton protested. "Why go there at this time of year? Why not wait until warmer weather?"

"There are some things I need to take care of," she informed him vaguely. "Besides, I feel like getting away by myself. I think you need a rest from me, too."

He made the usual protests that he would die of loneliness until she returned; but all the time he spoke, his mind was racing excitedly ahead. Hightower was a perfect destination. Because of its awkward location, she would have to take one of the smaller airlines, which meant there wouldn't be so many other people involved when the plane blew up. And the fewer the other victims, the quicker the thing would be hushed up.

Besides, much of the flight would be over the mountains where it would be difficult to find the wreckage of a small plane. It might even be spring before they found Aunt Gertrude, and by that time no one would be able to find him either . . .

Clayton managed to take fifteen minutes over his coffee, then drew out the purchase of a magazine as long as he possibly could. By the time he returned to Aunt Gertrude, she was impatient with waiting.

"I'm sorry I took so long," he apologized. "I—I guess I just got lost in thought."

She made a disgruntled, incoherent kind of retort, then motioned for him to sit down.

"It's all right, Clayton," she said. "I want to have a little talk with you. There are some things that need saying."

Unconsciously her hands patted the suitcase which still rested on her lap and Clayton could feel the color leaving his face.

So she *did* know. Now was the time she would expose him.

He tried to smile, but the muscles of his face froze while every other muscle of his body turned to quivering jelly.

"Yes, Aunt Gertrude," he managed to say. "Let's have a nice cozy little chat."

"I'm tired of these nice cozy little chats," she snapped. "That's why I'm going away."

From long experience Clayton knew that it was better at times to say nothing. He looked at her in what he hoped was an interested and expectant manner.

"Now listen carefully," she went on. "This is the story I want you

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to give that nice young man."

Clayton Byrde's mouth was too dry to make any vocal response at all. He managed to nod his head to indicate that he was listening.

"Tell him this is my farewell flight," she said, showing no more emotion than when she announced that she was going to bed. "I expect to die of natural causes in my own bed at Hightower. Tonight. I do not choose to live any longer."

Clayton was incapable of making even the mild protest that the statement called for.

"I've written ahead to Mrs. Madden to open and clean the house and to turn the heat on," she continued. "I will simply go to bed tonight and not wake up. I don't want to be dragged back here for the funeral because nobody would come. It will be cheaper if you fly to Hightower tomorrow. I would like to have you there."

Only by extreme effort was Clayton able to keep from toppling forward in a faint. He could not have possibly felt worse if she had denounced him and his bomb. In his mind there was no question but that Aunt Gertrude would do exactly as she planned. And he—he could be blown to bits any minute himself now, or electrocuted later for killing her ten or twelve hours before her own appointed time.

"Don't look so worried," she said, concerned at his ghastly expression. "I'm way past due, like that dratted plane."

She began to fuss with the catch of the suitcase. Clayton sprang suddenly to life, leaped from his chair, and stood over her as if to grab it from her hands.

"What on earth?" she asked, startled. "I'm only trying to get out something I want to give you."

"I—I just remembered," he stammered. "Oh, Aunt Gertrude, I did a terrible thing. I locked the suitcase and left the keys on the dresser in your room."

This explanation satisfied her—it was so typical of him.

"Oh, well, never mind," she laughed. "I guess I don't really need any of this stuff, do I?"

"No—no, I don't suppose you do. Not if—not if you—"

She touched him lightly with her black-gloved hand, as if to brush away his worries.

"Sit down," she said lightly. 'I'm afraid I've made you nervous talking like this. Just don't worry about the suitcase. There's nothing in it I really need. I'll leave it behind with you."

Relief flooded over Clayton in such a tide that he could scarcely stand it.

Now there was nothing to worry about. The same Providence which was placing the suitcase in his hands would bring the plane in without further delay. It would also watch over him while he disposed of the bomb. The contrivance was so delicate that the mere opening of the lid would set it off. There

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was no possible way of dismantling it, but given only a ten minute start he could get out of the airport and toss the thing into the ditch beside the road. No one could ever trace it to him and Aunt Gertrude would be safely dead at Hightower before word reached that remote area.

"I've only one regret," Aunt Gertrude went on. "I would like to see the expression on your face when you open that suitcase."

Now it began again—the cold chills, the sickness, the terror.

So she *did* know, and she wasn't frightened sitting with it on her lap because she planned to die tonight anyway.

What a cruel woman she was, he thought, turning the tables on him like that, leaving the bomb behind, planting it on him. Had she been watching when he placed it on top of her clothing? Or had she guessed what he was doing all those nights in the basement?

"I've just thought of something funny, Clayton," Aunt Gertrude said, and this was surprising because he could not remember that she had ever thought of anything funny before.

"Yes?"

"You could save time by making your reservation for Hightower right now while you are here in the airport. Except for one thing. If it came out that you bought a ticket for my funeral before I was dead, people might wonder."

Clayton's mind went back to a disgusting scene he had once witnessed in his childhood. Common enough, but disgusting. A cat was playing with a mouse. Playing? Torturing it, killing it. And even as he had watched in fascination, the thought had crossed his mind that it was the mouse's own fault. If it had stayed in its own hole until the cat went away, it would never have been in such a fix. What made it think it could outsmart that big old gray cat?

"You have been very good to me," Aunt Gertrude suddenly changed the subject. This was the part where the mouse was permitted to walk around for a few frightened steps, Clayton thought. "I can see that now. Regardless of your motives, I think you have tried to be kind and I want you to know that I appreciate it."

From long-established habit, his face settled back into its customary look of piety.

"Stop smirking," she ordered. "I would like some other memory of my family besides everybody smirking and agreeing with me no matter what I said."

"Yes, Aunt Gertrude."

She ignored him for several minutes. Then, because it was getting close to plane time and she still had a lot to say, she spoke again.

"What I started to say was that your whole family has put up with me for forty years. I have a good idea why, but never mind that. You

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did do it and I can remember a great many really kind things all of you did. The biggest thing was that you gave me a sense of belonging to a family. I traveled a lot, partly to keep from being a burden and partly because I wanted to. But I always had some place to come home to and someone to meet me and pretend to be glad to see me."

The loudspeaker interrupted her then, announcing that her plane was coming in at Gate B-4.

"This is it," she said quietly. "I don't want any goodbyes. I don't even want you to wheel me to the gate. I'll walk."

With surprising vigor she thrust the suitcase into his hands and rose to her feet. She was almost as tall as he, and a great deal more erect.

"Don't even bother to unpack the suitcase," she said. "Just give the whole thing to the Salvation Army. All except my new will. It's in the suitcase. Take it directly to Mr. Hadley this afternoon and make sure he tears up the old one."

She knew he couldn't say anything and didn't expect him to.

"I got to thinking, Clayton, there is only one human being in the world left who knows me or even cares a little about me. I'm leaving you everything. Everything."

She gave him a light peck on the cheek and squeezed his arm.

"Just one thing more. I got to feeling sorry for the college so I changed my insurance policies in Antrim's favor. Not a bad trade for you, is it?"

She either smiled or leered at him. He couldn't tell which. Then, with a swiftness which belied her years, she disappeared into the crowd."

He caught sight of her once, moving with elegant grace and only a little more slowly than the others. She half turned and bowed as she came to a corner which would take her out of sight. Nodding her head in the old imperious manner, she lifted her right hand in a wave reminiscent of the Royal Family.

Her parting gesture seemed to dismiss Clayton, but it was minutes before he could force himself to move. Then he placed the suitcase on the wheel chair and started slowly for the door.

It was only when he remembered to glance at his wrist watch that he realized how short his time was and increased his pace. And then remembering that it made no real difference whether he walked or ran, he slowed again to his normal gait.

In his own way he looked every bit as dignified as Aunt Gertrude when he pushed the wheel chair through the electric-eye door.

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THE WILLOW WALK

by SINCLAIR LEWIS

(continued from page 84)

The inhabitants of Rosebank were familiar with the occasional appearances of John Holt, the eccentric recluse, and they merely snickered about him when on the Saturday evening following the Friday that has been chronicled he was seen to come out of his gate and trudge down to a news and stationery shop on Main Street.

He purchased an evening paper and said to the clerk, "You can have the *Morning Herald* delivered at my house every morning—27 Humbert Avenue."

"Yuh, I know where it is. Thought you had kind of a grouch on newspapers," said the clerk pertly.

"Ah, did you indeed? The *Herald,* every morning, please. I will pay a month in advance," John Holt replied.

John attended the meeting of the Soul Hope Fraternity the next evening—Sunday—but he was not seen on the streets again for two and a half days.

There was no news of the disappearance of Jasper Holt till the following Wednesday when the whole affair came out in a violent, small-city, front-page story, most excitingly headlined:

PAYING TELLER
SOCIAL FAVORITE—MAKES GETAWAY

The paper stated that Jasper Holt had been missing for four days and that the officers of the bank, after first denying that there was anything wrong with his accounts, had admitted that he was short $100,000, said one report. He had purchased a ticket for Wakamin, this state, on Friday and a trainman, a customer of the bank, had noticed him on the train, but he had apparently never arrived at Wakamin.

A woman asserted that on Friday afternoon she had seen Holt driving an automobile between Vernon and St. Clair. This appearance near St. Clair was supposed to be merely a blind, however. In fact, our able Chief of Police had proof that Holt was not headed north, in the direction of St. Clair, but south, beyond Wanagoochie—probably for Des Moines or St. Louis.

It was definitely known that on the previous day Holt had left his car at Wanagoochie, and with their customary thoroughness and promptness the police were making search at Wanagoochie. The Chief had already communicated with the police in cities to the south

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and the capture of the man could confidently be expected at any moment. As long as the Chief appointed by our popular Mayor was in power, it went ill with those who gave even the appearance of wrongdoing.

When asked his opinion of the theory that the alleged fugitive had gone north, the Chief declared that of course Holt had started in that direction, with the vain hope of throwing pursuers off the scent; but that he had immediately turned south and picked up his car. Though he would not say so definitely, the Chief let it be known that he was ready to put his hands on the fellow who had hidden Holt's car at Wanagoochie.

When asked if he thought Holt was crazy, the Chief laughed and said, "Yes, he's crazy two hundred thousand dollars' worth. I'm not making any slams, but there's a lot of fellows among our political opponents who would go a whole lot crazier for a whole lot less!"

The president of the bank, however, was greatly distressed and strongly declared his belief that Holt, who was a favorite in the most sumptuous residences on the Boulevard, besides being well known in local dramatic circles, and who bore the best of reputations in the bank, was temporarily out of his mind, as he had been suffering from pains in the head for some time past. Meantime, the bonding company, which had fully covered the employees of the bank by a joint bond of $200,000 had its detectives working with the police on the case.

As soon as he had read the paper John took a trolley into Vernon and called on the president of the bank. John's face drooped with the sorrow of the disgrace. The president received him. John staggered into the room, groaning, "I have just learned in the newspaper of the terrible news about my brother. I have come—"

"We hope it's just a case of aphasia. We're sure he'll turn up all right," insisted the president.

"I wish I could believe it. But as I have told you, Jasper is not a good man. He drinks and smokes and play-acts and makes a god of stylish clothes—"

"Good Lord, that's no reason for jumping to the conclusion that he's an embezzler!"

I pray you may be right. But meanwhile I wish to give you any assistance I can. I shall make it my sole duty to see that my brother is brought to justice if it proves that he is guilty."

"Good of you," mumbled the president.

Despite this example of John's rigid honor he could not get himself to like the man. John was standing beside him, thrusting his stupid face into his.

The president pushed his chair a foot farther away and said disagreeably, "As a matter of fact, we were

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thinking of searching your house. If I remember, you live in Rosebank?"

"Yes. And of course I shall be glad to have you search every inch of it. Or anything else I can do. I feel that I share fully with my twin brother in this unspeakable sin. I'll turn over the key of my house to you at once. There is also a shed at the back where Jasper used to keep his automobile when he came to see me." He produced a large, rusty, old-fashioned door key and held it out, adding, "The address is 27 Humbert Avenue, Rosebank."

"Oh, it won't be necessary, I guess," said the president, somewhat shamed, irritably waving off the key.

"But I *want* to help somehow! What can I do? Who is the detective on the case? I'll give him any help—"

"Tell you what you do: go see Mr. Scandling of the Mercantile Trust and Bonding Company and tell him all you know."

"I shall. I take my brother's crime on my shoulders—otherwise I'd be committing the sin of Cain. You are giving me a chance to try to expiate our joint sin, and, as Brother Jeremiah Bodfish was wont to say, it is a blessing to have an opportunity to expiate a sin, no matter how painful the punishment may seem to the mere physical being. As I may have told you I am an accepted member of the Soul Hope Fraternity, and though we are free from cant and dogma it is our firm belief—"

Then for ten dreary minutes John Holt sermonized: quoted forgotten books and quaint, ungenerous elders; twisted bitter pride and clumsy mysticism into a fanatical spider web. The president was a churchgoer, an ardent supporter of missionary funds, for forty years a pew-holder at St. Simeon's Church, but he was alternately bored to a chill shiver and roused to wrath against this self-righteous zealot.

When he had rather rudely got rid of John Holt he complained to himself, "Curse it, I oughtn't to, but I must say I prefer Jasper the sinner to John the saint. Uff! What a smell of damp cellars the fellow has! He must spend all his time picking potatoes. Say! By thunder, I remember that Jasper had the infernal nerve to tell me once that if he ever robbed the bank I was to call John in. I know why now! John is the kind of egotistical fool that would muddle up any kind of a systematic search. Well, Jasper, sorry, but I'm not going to have anything more to do with John than I can help!"

John had gone to the Mercantile Trust and Bonding Company, had called on Mr. Scandling, and was now wearying him by a detailed and useless account of Jasper's early years and recent vices. He was turned over to the detective employed by the bonding company to find Jasper.

The detective was a hard, noisy

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man, who found John even more tedious. John insisted on his coming out to examine the house in Rosebank and the detective did so —but sketchily, trying to escape. John spent at least five minutes in showing him the shed where Jasper had sometimes kept his car.

He also attempted to interest the detective in his precious but spotty books. He unlocked one section of the case, dragged down a four-volume set of sermons, and started to read them aloud.

The detective interrupted, "Yes, that's great stuff, but I guess we aren't going to find your brother hiding behind those books!"

The detective got away as soon as possible, after explaining to John that if they could use his assistance they would let him know.

"If I can only expiate—"

"Sure, that's all right!" wailed the detective, fairly running toward the gate.

John made one more visit to Vernon that day. He called on the Chief of Police. He informed the Chief that he had taken the bonding company's detective through his house, but wouldn't the police consent to search it also? He wanted to expiate— The Chief patted John on the back, advised him not to feel responsible for his brother's guilt, and begged, "Skip along now—very busy."

As John walked to the Soul Hope meeting that evening dozens of people murmured that it was his brother who had robbed the Lumber National Bank. His head was bowed with the shame.

At the meeting he took Jasper's sin upon himself and prayed that Jasper would be caught and receive the blessed healing of punishment. The others begged John not to feel that he was guilty—was he not one of the Soul Hope brethren who alone in this wicked and perverse generation were assured of salvation?

On Thursday, on Saturday morning, on Tuesday, and on Friday, John went into the city to call on the president of the bank and the detective. Twice the president saw him and was infinitely bored by his sermons. The third time he sent word that he was out. The fourth time he saw John, but curtly explained that if John wanted to help them the best thing he could do was to stay away.

The detective was out all four times.

John smiled meekly and ceased to try to help them. Dust began to gather on certain candy boxes on the lower shelf of his bookcase, save for one of them, which he took out now and then. Always after he had taken it out a man with faded brown hair and a wrinkled black suit, a man signing himself R. J. Smith, would send a fair-sized money order from the post office at South Vernon to John Holt, at Rosebank—as he had been doing for more than six months.

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These money orders could not have amounted to more than twenty-five dollars a week, but that was even more than an ascetic like John Holt needed. By day John sometimes cashed these at the Rosebank post office, but usually, as had been his custom, he cashed them at his favorite grocery when he went out in the evening.

In conversation with the commuter neighbor, who every evening walked about and smoked an after-dinner cigar in the yard at the right, John was frank about the whole lamentable business of his brother's crime. He wondered, he said, if he had not shut himself up with his studies too much, and neglected his brother. The neighbor ponderously advised John to get out more. John let himself be persuaded, at least to the extent of taking a short walk every afternoon and of letting his literary solitude be disturbed by the delivery of milk, meat, and groceries. He also went to the public library, and in the reference room glanced at books on Central and South America—as though he were planning to go south some day.

But he continued his religious studies. It may be doubted if previous to the embezzlement John had worked very consistently on his book about Revelation. All that the world had ever seen of it was a jumble of quotations from theological authorities. Presumably the crime of his brother shocked him into more concentrated study, more patient writing. For during the year after his brother's disappearance—a year in which the bonding company gradually gave up the search and came to believe that Jasper was dead—John became fanatically absorbed in somewhat nebulous work. The days and nights drifted together in meditation in which he lost sight of realities, and seemed through the clouds of the flesh to see flashes from the towered cities of the spirit.

It has been asserted that when Jasper Holt acted a role he veritably lived it. No one can ever determine how great an actor was lost in the smug bank teller. To him were imperial triumphs denied, yet he was not without material reward. For playing his most subtle part he received $97,000. It may be that he earned it. Certainly for the risk entailed it was but a fair payment, Jasper had meddled with the mystery of personality and was in peril of losing all consistent purpose, of becoming a Wandering Jew of the spirit, a strangled body walking.

The sharp-pointed willow leaves had twisted and fallen, after the dreary rains of October. Bark had peeled from the willow trunks, leaving gashes of bare wood that was a wet and sickly yellow. Through the denuded trees bulked the solid stone of John Holt's house. The patches of earth were greasy between the tawny knots of grass

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stems. The bricks of the walk were always damp now. The world was hunched up in this pervading chill.

As melancholy as the sick earth seemed the man who in a slaty twilight paced the willow walk. His step was slack, his lips moved with the intensity of his meditation. Over his wrinkled black suit and bleak shirt bosom was a worn overcoat, the velvet collar turned green. He was considering.

"There's something to all this. I begin to see—I don't know what it is I do see! But there are lights—a supernatural world that makes food and bed seem ridiculous. I am —I really am beyond the law! I make my own law! Why shouldn't I go beyond the law of vision and see the secrets of life? But I sinned, and I must repent—some day. I need not return the money. I see now that it was given me so that I could lead this life of contemplation. But the ingratitude to the president, to the people who trusted me! Am I but the most miserable of sinners, and as the blind? Voices —I hear conflicting voices—some praising me for my courage, some rebuking——"

He knelt on the slimy black surface of a wooden bench beneath the willows and as dusk clothed him round about he prayed. It seemed to him that he prayed not in words but in vast confusing dreams—the words of a language larger than human tongues.

When he had exhausted himself he slowly entered the house. He locked the door. There was nothing definite of which he was afraid, but he was never comfortable with the door unlocked.

By candlelight he prepared his austere supper—dry toast, an egg, cheap tea with thin milk. As always —as it had happened after every meal, now, for eighteen months—he wanted a cigarette when he had eaten, but did not take one.

He paced into the living room and through the long still hours of the evening he read an ancient book, all footnotes and cross references, about *The Numerology of the Prophetic Books, and the Number of the Beast*. He tried to make notes for his own book on Revelation—that scant pile of sheets covered with writing in a small finicky hand. Thousands of other sheets he had covered; through whole nights he had written; but always he seemed with tardy pen to be racing after thoughts that he could never quite catch, and most of what he had written he had savagely burned.

But some day he would make a masterpiece! He was feeling toward the greatest discovery that mortal man had encountered. Everything, he had determined, was a symbol—not just this holy sign and that, but all physical manifestations. With frightened exultation he tried his new power of divination. The hanging lamp swung tinily. He ventured: "If the arc of that moving

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radiance touches the edge of the bookcase, then it will be a sign that I am to go to South America, and spend my money."

He shuddered. He watched the lamp's unbearably slow swing. The moving light almost touched the bookcase. He gasped. Then it receded.

It was a warning; he quaked. Would he never leave this place of brooding and of fear, which he had thought so clever a refuge? He suddenly saw it all.

"I ran away and hid in a prison! Man isn't caught by justice—he catches himself!"

Again he tried. He speculated as to whether the number of pencils on the table was greater or less than five. If greater, then he had sinned; if less, then he was veritably beyond the law. He began to lift books and papers, looking for pencils. He was coldly sweating with the suspense of the test.

Suddenly he cried, "Am I going crazy?"

He fled to his prosaic bedroom. He could not sleep. His brain was smoldering, with confused inklings of mystic numbers and hidden warnings.

He woke from a half sleep more vision-haunted than any waking thought, and cried, "I must go back and confess! But I can't! I can't, when I was too clever for them! I can't go back and let them win. I won't let those fools just sit tight and still catch me!"

It was a year and a half since Jasper had disappeared. Sometimes it seemed a month and a half; sometimes gray centuries. John's will power had been shrouded with curious puttering studies; long, heavy-breathing sittings with the ouija board on his lap, midnight hours when he had fancied that tables had tapped and crackling coals had spoken.

Now that the second autumn of his seclusion was creeping into winter he was conscious that he had not enough initiative to carry out his plans for going to South America. The summer before he had boasted to himself that he would come out of hiding and go South, leaving such a twisty trail as only he could make. But—oh, it was too much trouble. He hadn't the joy in play-acting which had carried his brother Jasper through his preparations for flight.

He had killed Jasper Holt, and for a miserable little pile of paper money he had become a moldy recluse!

He hated his loneliness, but still more did he hate his only companions, the members of the Soul Hope Fraternity—that pious shrill seamstress, that surly carpenter, that tight-lipped housekeeper, that old shouting man with the unseemly frieze of whiskers. They were so unimaginative. Their meetings were all the same; the same persons rose in the same order and made the same intimate announcements

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to the Deity that they alone were his elect.

At first it had been an amusing triumph to be accepted as the most eloquent among them, but that had become commonplace; he resented their daring to be familiar with him, who was, he felt, the only man of all men living who saw the strange beatitude of higher souls beyond the illusions of the world.

It was at the end of November, during a Wednesday meeting at which a red-faced man had for a half hour maintained that he couldn't possibly sin, that the cumulative ennui burst in John Holt's brain. He sprang up.

He snarled, "You make me sick, all of you! You think you're so certain of sanctification that you can't do wrong. So did I, once! Now, I know that we are all miserable sinners—really are! You all *say* you are, but you don't believe it. I tell you that you there that have just been yammering, and you, Brother Judkins, with the long twitching nose, and I—I—I, most unhappy of men, we must repent, confess, expiate our sins! And I will confess right now. I st-stole——"

Terrified he darted out of the hall, and hatless, coatless, tumbled through the main street of Rosebank, nor ceased till he had locked himself in his house. He was frightened because he had almost betrayed his secret, yet agonized because he had not gone on, really confessed, and gained the only peace he could ever know now—the peace of punishment.

He never returned to Soul Hope Hall. Indeed, for a week he did not leave his house except for midnight prowling in the willow walk. Quite suddenly he became desperate with the silence. He flung out of the house, not stopping to lock or even close the front door. He raced uptown, no topcoat over his rotting garments, only an old gardener's cap on his thick brown hair. People stared at him. He bore it with resigned fury.

He entered a lunchroom, hoping to sit inconspicuously and hear men talking normally. The attendant at the counter gaped. John heard a mutter from the cashier's desk: "There's that crazy hermit!"

All of the half dozen young men loafing in the place were looking at him. He was so uncomfortable that he could not eat even the milk and sandwich he had ordered. He pushed them away and fled, a failure in the first attempt to dine out that he had made in eighteen months; a lamentable failure to revive that Jasper Holt whom he had coldly killed.

He entered a cigar store and bought a pack of cigarettes. He took joy out of throwing away his asceticism. But when, on the street, he lighted a cigarette it made him so dizzy that he was afraid he was going to fall. He had to sit down on the curb. People gathered. He staggered to his feet and up an alley.

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For hours he walked, making and discarding the most contradictory plans—to go to the bank and confess, to spend the money riotously and never confess.

It was midnight when he returned to his house.

Before it he gasped. The front door was open. He chuckled with relief as he remembered that he had not closed it. He sauntered in. He was passing the door of the living room, going directly up to his bedroom, when his foot struck an object the size of a book, but hollow sounding.

He picked it up. It was one of the booklike candy boxes. And it was quite empty.

Frightened, he listened. There was no sound. He crept into the living room and lighted the lamp.

The doors of the bookcase had been wrenched open. Every book had been pulled out on the floor. All the candy boxes, which that evening had contained almost $96,000, were in a pile, and all were empty.

He searched for ten minutes, but the only money he found was one five-dollar bill, which had fluttered under the table. In his pocket he had one dollar and sixteen cents.

John Holt had $6.60, no job, no friends—and no identity.

When the president of the Lumber National Bank was informed that John Holt was waiting to see him he scowled.

"Lord, I'd forgotten that minor plague! Must be a year since he's been here. Oh, let him— No, hanged if I will! Tell him I'm too busy to see him. That is, unless he's got some news about Jasper. Pump him and find out."

The president's secretary sweetly confided to John: "I'm so sorry, but the president is in conference just now. What was it you wanted to see him about? Is there any news about —uh—about your brother?"

"There is not, miss. I am here to see the president on the business of the Lord."

"Oh. If that's all I'm afraid I can't disturb him."

"I will wait."

Wait he did, through all the morning, through the lunch hour —when the president hastened out past him—then into the afternoon, till the president was unable to work with the thought of that scarecrow out there, and sent for him.

"Well, well! What is it this time, John? I'm pretty busy. No news about Jasper, eh?"

"No news, sir, but—Jasper himself! I am Jasper Holt! His sin is my sin."

"Yes, yes, I know all that stuff—twin brothers, twin souls, share responsibility—"

"You don't understand. There isn't any twin brother. There isn't any John Holt. I am Jasper. I invented an imaginary brother and disguised myself— Why, don't you

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recognize my voice?"

While John leaned over the desk, his two hands upon it, and smiled wistfully, the president shook his head and soothed, "No, I'm afraid I don't. Sounds, like good old religious John to me! Jasper was a cheerful, efficient sort of crook. Why, his laugh—"

"But I can laugh!" The dreadful croak which John uttered was the cry of an evil bird of the swamps. The president shuddered. Under the edge of the desk his fingers crept toward the buzzer by which he summoned his secretary.

They stopped as John urged, "Look—this wig—it *is* a wig. See, I *am* Jasper!"

He had snatched off the brown thatch. He stood expectant.

The president was startled, but he shook his head and sighed.

"You poor devil! Wig, all right. But I wouldn't say that hair was much like Jasper's!"

He motioned toward the mirror in the corner of the room.

John wavered to it. And he saw that his hair had turned from Jasper's thin sleek blackness to a straggle of damp gray locks writhing over a yellow skull.

He begged pitifully, "Oh, can't you see I *am* Jasper? I stole ninety-seven thousand dollars from the bank. I want to be punished! I want to do anything to prove— Why, I've been at your house. Your wife's name is Evelyn. My salary here was——"

"My dear boy, don't you suppose that Jasper might have told you all these interesting facts? I'm afraid the worry of this has—pardon me if I'm frank, but I'm afraid it's turned your head a little, John."

"There *isn't* any John! There isn't! There isn't!"

"I'd believe that a little more easily if I hadn't met you before Jasper disappeared."

"Give me a piece of paper. You know my writing—"

With clutching claws John seized a sheet of bank stationery and tried to write in the round script of Jasper. During the past year and a half he had filled thousands of pages with the small finicky hand of John. Now, though he tried to prevent it, the shaky letters became smaller, more pinched, less legible.

Even while John wrote the president looked at the sheet and said, "Afraid it's no use. That isn't Jasper's fist. See here, I want you to get away from Rosebank—go to some farm—work outdoors—cut out this fuming and fussing—get some fresh air in your lungs." The president rose and purred, "Now, I'm afraid I have some work to do."

He paused, waiting.

John fiercely crumpled the sheet and hurled it away. Tears were in his weary eyes.

He wailed, "Is there *nothing* I can do to prove I am Jasper?"

"Why, certainly! You can produce what's left of the ninety-seven thousand dollars!"

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John took from his ragged waistcoat pocket a five-dollar bill and some change. "Here's all there is. Ninety-six thousand of it was stolen from my house last night."

Sorry though he was for the madman, the president could not help laughing. Then he tried to look sympathetic as he comforted: "Well, that's hard luck, old man. Uh, let's see. You might produce some parents or relatives or somebody to prove that Jasper never did have a twin brother."

"My parents are dead and I've lost track of their kin—I was born in England—Father came over when I was six. There might be some cousins or some old neighbors, but I don't know. Probably impossible to find out without going over there."

"Well, I guess we'll have to let it go, old man." The president was pressing the buzzer for his secretary and gently bidding her, "Show Mr. Holt out, please."

From the door John desperately tried to add, "You will find my car sunk—"

The door had closed behind him. The president had not even bothered to listen.

The president gave orders that never, for any reason, was John Holt to be admitted to his office again. He telephoned to the bonding company that John Holt had now gone crazy, that they would save themselves trouble by refusing to admit him.

John did not try to see them. He went to the county jail. He entered the keeper's office and said quietly, "I have stolen a lot of money, but I can't prove it. Will you put me in jail?"

The keeper shouted, "Get out of here! You hoboes always spring that when you want a good warm lodging for the winter! Why the devil don't you go to work with a shovel in the sand pits? They're paying two-seventy-five a day."

"Yes, sir," said John timorously. "Where are they?"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**AGATHA CHRISTIE**
TITLE:	***The Chinese Puzzle Box***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Hercule Poirot
LOCALE:	England
TIME:	A generation ago
COMMENTS:	*"M. Poirot, do you think you can help me?" "Have faith in Papa Poirot. I will find a way" . . . and you can be sure he will!*

I HAD NOTICED THAT FOR SOME time Hercule Poirot had been growing increasingly dissatisfied and restless. We had had no interesting cases of late, nothing on which my little friend could exercise his keen wits and remarkable powers of deduction. This July morning he flung down the newspaper with an impatient *"Tchah!"* —a favorite exclamation of his which sounded exactly like a cat sneezing.

"They fear me, Hastings—the criminals of your England they fear me! When the cat is there, the little mice, they come no more to the cheese!"

"I don't suppose the greater part of them even know of your existence," I said, laughing.

Poirot looked at me reproachfully. He always imagines that the whole world is thinking and talking of Hercule Poirot. He had certainly made a name for himself in London, but I could hardly believe that his existence struck terror into the criminal world.

"What about that daylight robbery of jewels in Bond Street the other day?" I asked.

"A neat *coup*," said Poirot approvingly, "though not in my line. *Pas de finesse, seulment de l'audace!* A man with a loaded cane smashes the plate-glass window of a jeweler's shop and grabs a num-

© 1925 by Dodd Mead and Co.; renewed 1953 by Agatha Christie Mallowan; originally titled "The Veiled Lady."

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ber of precious stones. Worthy citizens immediately seize him; a policeman arrives. He is caught red-handed with the jewels on him. He is marched off to the police station, and then it is discovered that the stones are paste. He has passed the real ones to a confederate—one of the aforementioned worthy citizens. He will go to prison—true; but when he comes out, there will be a nice little fortune awaiting him. Yes, not badly imagined. But I could do better than that. Sometimes, Hastings, I regret that I am of such a moral disposition. To work against the law, it would be pleasing, for a change."

"Cheer up, Poirot. You know you are unique in your own line."

"But what is there on hand in my own line?"

I picked up the paper. "Here's an Englishman mysteriously done to death in Holland," I said.

"They always say that—and later they find that he ate the tinned fish and that his death is perfectly natural."

"Well, if you're determined to grouse!"

"Tiens!" said Poirot, who had strolled across to the window. "Here in the street is what they call in novels a 'heavily veiled lady.' She mounts the steps; she rings the bell—she comes to consult us. Here is a possibility of something interesting. When one is as young and pretty as that one, one does not veil the face except for a big affair."

A minute later our visitor was ushered in. As Poirot had said, she was indeed heavily veiled. It was impossible to distinguish her features until she raised her veil of black Spanish lace. Then I saw that Poirot's intuition had been right; the lady was extremely pretty, with fair hair and large blue eyes. From the costly simplicity of her attire, I deduced at once that she belonged to an upper stratum of society.

"Monsieur Poirot," said the lady in a soft, musical voice, "I am in great trouble. I can hardly believe that you can help me, but I have heard such wonderful things of you that I come literally as a last hope to beg you to do the impossible."

"The impossible, it pleases me always," said Poirot. "Continue, I beg of you, mademoiselle."

Our fair guest hesitated.

"But you must be frank," added Poirot. "You must not leave me in the dark on any point."

"I will trust you," said the girl suddenly. "You have heard of Lady Millicent Castle Vaughan?"

I looked up with keen interest. The announcement of Lady Millicent's engagement to the young Duke of Southshire had appeared a few days previously. She was, I knew, the fifth daughter of an impecunious Irish peer, and the Duke of Southshire was one of the best matches in England.

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"I am Lady Millicent," continued the girl. "You may have read of my engagement. I should be one of the happiest girls alive, but oh, M. Poirot, I am in terrible trouble! There is a man, a horrible man—his name is Lavington; and he—I hardly know how to tell you. There was a letter I wrote—I was only sixteen at the time; and he—he—"

"A letter that you wrote to this Mr. Lavington?"

"Oh, *no*—not to him! To a young soldier—I was very fond of him—he was killed in the war."

"I understand," said Poirot kindly.

"It was a foolish letter, an indiscreet letter, but indeed, M. Poirot, nothing more. But there are phrases in it which—which might bear a different interpretation."

"I see," said Poirot. "And this letter has come into the possession of Mr. Lavington?"

"Yes, and he threatens, unless I pay him an enormous sum of money, a sum that it is quite impossible for me to raise, to send it to the Duke."

"The dirty swine!" I exclaimed. "I beg your pardon, Lady Millicent."

"Would it not be wiser to confess all to your future husband?"

"I dare not, M. Poirot. The Duke is a very jealous man, suspicious and prone to believe the worst. I might as well break off my engagement at once."

"Dear, dear," said Poirot with an expressive grimace. "And what do you want me to do, milady?"

"I thought perhaps that I might ask Mr. Lavington to call upon you. I would tell him that you were empowered by me to discuss the matter. Perhaps you could reduce his demands."

"What sum does he mention?"

"Twenty thousand pounds—an impossibility. I doubt if I could raise even a thousand."

"You might perhaps borrow the money on the prospect of your approaching marriage—but *eh bien*, it is repugnant to me that you should pay! No, the ingenuity of Hercule Poirot shall defeat your enemies! Send me this Mr. Lavington. Is he likely to bring the letter with him?"

The girl shook her head.

"I do not think so. He is very cautious."

"I suppose there is no doubt that he really has it?"

"He showed it to me when I went to his house."

"You went to his house? That was very imprudent, milady."

"Was it? I was so desperate. I hoped my entreaties might move him."

"Oh, *lá lá!* The Lavingtons of this world are not moved by entreaties! He would welcome them as showing how much importance you attached to the document. Where does he live, this fine gentleman?"

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"At Buona Vista, Wimbledon. I went there after dark—" Poirot groaned. "I declared that I would inform the police in the end, but he only laughed in a horrid, sneering manner. 'By all means, my dear Lady Millicent, do so if you wish,' he said."

"Yes, it is hardly an affair for the police," murmured Poirot.

"'But I think you will be wiser than that,' he said. 'See, here is your letter—in this little Chinese puzzle box!' He held it so that I could see. I tried to snatch at it, but he was too quick for me. With a horrid smile he folded it up and replaced it in the little wooden box. 'It will be quite safe here, I assure you,' he said, 'and I keep the box itself in such a clever place that you would never find it.' My eyes turned to the small wall-safe, and he shook his head and laughed. 'I have a better safe than that,' he said. Oh, he was odious! Do you think you can help me?"

"Have faith in Papa Poirot. I will find a way."

These reassurances were all very well, I thought, as Poirot gallantly ushered his fair client down the stairs, but it seemed to me that we had a tough nut to crack. I said as much to Poirot when he returned. He nodded ruefully.

"Yes—the solution does not leap to the eye. He has the whip hand, this M. Lavington. For the moment I do not see how we are to circumvent him."

Mr. Lavington duly called on us that afternoon. Lady Millicent had spoken truly when she described him as an odious man. I felt a positive tingling in the end of my boot, so keen was I to kick him down the stairs.

He was blustering and overbearing in manner, laughed Poirot's gentle suggestions to scorn, and generally showed himself as master of the situation. I could not help feeling that Poirot was hardly appearing at his best. He looked discouraged and crestfallen.

"Well, gentlemen," said Lavington, as he took up his hat, "we don't seem to be getting much farther. The case stands like this: I'll let the Lady Millicent off cheap, as she is such a charming young lady. We'll say eighteen thousand. I'm off to Paris today—a little piece of business to attend to over there. I shall be back on Tuesday. Unless the money is paid by Tuesday evening, the letter goes to the Duke. Don't tell me Lady Millicent can't raise the money. Some of her gentlemen friends would be only too willing to oblige such a pretty woman with a loan—if she goes about it the right way."

I took a step forward, but Lavington had wheeled out of the room as he finished his sentence.

"My God!" I cried. "Something has got to be done. You seem to be taking this lying down, Poirot."

"You have an excellent heart, my friend—but your gray cells are

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in a deplorable condition. I have no wish to impress Mr. Lavington with my capabilities. The more pusillanimous he thinks me, the better."

"Why?"

"It is curious," murmured Poirot reminiscently, "that I should have uttered a wish to work against the law just before Lady Millicent arrived!"

"You are going to burgle his house while he is away?" I gasped.

"Sometimes, Hastings, your mental processes are amazingly quick."

"Suppose he takes the letter with him?"

Poirot shook his head. "That is very unlikely. He has evidently a hiding place in his house that he fancies to be impregnable."

"When do we—er—do the deed?"

"Tomorrow night. We will start from here about eleven o'clock."

At the time appointed I was ready to set off. I had donned a dark suit and a soft dark hat. Poirot beamed kindly on me.

"You have dressed the part, I see," he observed. "Come let us take the underground to Wimbledon."

"Aren't we going to take anything with us? Tools to break in with?"

"My dear Hastings, Hercule Poirot does not adopt such crude methods."

It was midnight when we entered the small suburban garden of Buona Vista. The house was dark and silent. Poirot went straight to a window at the back of the house, raised the sash noiselessly, and bade me enter.

"How did you know this window would be open?" I whispered, for really it seemed uncanny.

"Because I sawed through the catch this morning."

"What?"

"But yes, it was the most simple. I called, presented a fictitious card and one of Inspector Japp's official ones. I said I had been sent, recommended by Scotland Yard, to attend to some burglar-proof fastenings that Mr. Lavington wanted fixed while he was away. The housekeeper welcomed me with enthusiasm. It seems they have had two attempted burglaries here lately—evidently our little idea has occurred to other clients of Mr. Lavington's—with nothing of value taken. I examined all the windows, made my little arrangement, forbade the servants to touch the windows until tomorrow, as they were electrically connected up, and withdrew gracefully."

"Really, Poirot, you are wonderful."

"*Mon ami,* it was of the simplest. Now, to work! The servants sleep at the top of the house, so we will run little risk of disturbing them."

"I presume the safe is built into the wall somewhere?"

"Safe? Fiddlesticks! There is no

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safe. Mr. Lavington is an intelligent man. You will see, he will have devised a hiding place much more intelligent than a safe. A safe is the first thing everyone looks for."

Whereupon we began a systematic search. But after several hours' ransacking of the house, our search had been unavailing. I saw symptoms of anger gathering on Poirot's face.

"*Ah, sapristi,* is Hercule Poirot to be beaten? Never! Let us be calm. Let us reflect. Let us reason. Let us—*enfin!*—employ our little gray cells!"

He paused for some moments, bending his brows in concentration; then the green light I knew so well stole into his eyes.

"I have been an imbecile! The kitchen!"

"The kitchen," I cried. "But that's impossible. The servants!"

"Exactly. Just what ninety-nine people out of a hundred would say! And for that very reason the kitchen is the ideal place to choose. It is full of various homely objects. *En avant,* to the kitchen!"

I followed him, completely skeptical, and watched while he dived into bread bins, tapped saucepans, and put his head into the gas oven. In the end, tired of watching him, I strolled back to the study. I was convinced that there, and there only, would we find the *cache.* I made a further minute search, noted that it was now a quarter past four and that therefore it would soon be growing light, and then went back to the kitchen regions.

To my utter amazement, Poirot was now standing right inside the coal bin, to the utter ruin of his neat light suit. He made a grimace.

"But yes, my friend, it is against all my instincts so to ruin my appearance, but what will you?"

"Lavington can't have buried it under the coal!"

"If you would use your eyes, you would see that it is not the coal that I examine."

I then saw that on a shelf behind the coal bunker some logs of wood were piled. Poirot was dexterously taking them down one by one. Suddenly he uttered a low exclamation.

"Your knife, Hastings!"

I handed it to him. He appeared to insert it in the wood, and suddenly the log split in two. It had been neatly sawn in half and a cavity hollowed out in the center. From this cavity Poirot took a little wooden box of Chinese make.

"Well done!" I cried.

"Gently, Hastings! Do not raise your voice too much. Come, let us be off before the daylight is upon us."

Slipping the box into his pocket, he leaped lightly out of the coal bunker, brushed himself down as well as he could, and after leaving the house by the same way as we had entered, we walked rapidly in the direction of London.

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"But what an extraordinary place!" I expostulated. "Anyone might have used the log."

"In *July*, Hastings? And it was at the bottom of the pile—a very ingenious hiding place. Ah, here is a taxi! Now for home, a wash, and a refreshing sleep."

After the excitement of the night, I slept late. When I finally strolled into our sitting room just before twelve o'clock, I was surprised to see Poirot, leaning back in an armchair, the Chinese box open beside him, calmly reading the letter he had taken from it.

He smiled at me affectionately, and tapped the sheet he held.

"She was right, the Lady Millicent—never would the Duke have pardoned this letter! It contains some of the most extravagant terms of affection I have ever come across."

"Really, Poirot," I said, "I don't think you should have read the letter. That's the sort of thing that isn't done."

"It is done by Hercule Poirot," replied my friend imperturbably.

"And another thing," I said, "I don't think using Japp's official card yesterday was quite playing the game."

"But I was not playing a game, Hastings. I was conducting a case."

I shrugged—one can't argue with a point of view.

"A step on the stairs," said Poirot. "That will be Lady Millicent."

Our fair client came in with an anxious expression on her face which changed to one of delight on seeing the letter and box which Poirot held up.

"Oh, M. Poirot, how wonderful of you! How did you do it?"

"By rather reprehensible methods, milady. But Mr. Lavington will not prosecute. This is your letter, is it not?"

She glanced through it.

"Yes. Oh, how can I ever thank you! You are a wonderful, wonderful man. Where was it hidden?"

Poirot told her.

"How very clever of you!" She took up the small box from the table. "I shall keep this as a souvenir."

"I had hoped, milady, that you would permit me to keep it—also as a souvenir."

"I hope to send you a better souvenir than that—on my wedding day. You shall not find me ungrateful, M. Poirot."

"The pleasure of doing you a service will be more to me than a check—so you permit that I retain the box."

"Oh, no, M. Poirot, I simply must have that," she cried laughingly.

She stretched out her hand, but Poirot's closed over it. "I think not." His voice had changed.

"What do you mean?" Her voice seemed to have grown sharper.

"At any rate, permit me to ab-

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stract its further contents. You observe that the original cavity has been reduced by half. In the top half, the compromising letter; in the bottom—"

He made a nimble gesture, then held out his hand. On the palm were four large glittering stones, and two big milky white pearls.

"The jewels stolen in Bond Street the other day, I rather fancy," murmured Poirot. "Japp will tell us."

To my utter amazement Japp himself stepped out of Poirot's bedroom.

"An old friend of yours, I believe," said Poirot politely to Lady Millicent.

"Nabbed, by the Lord!" said Lady Millicent, with a complete change of manner. "You nippy old devil!" She looked at Poirot with almost affectionate awe.

"Well, Gertie, my dear," said Japp, "the game's up this time—fancy seeing you again so soon! We've got your pal, too, the gentleman who called here the other day *calling himself* Lavington. As for Lavington himself, alias Croker, alias Reed, I wonder which of the gang it was who stuck a knife into him the other day in Holland? Thought he'd got the goods with him, didn't you? And he hadn't. He double-crossed you properly—hid 'em in his own house. You had two fellows looking for them, and then you tackled M. Poirot here, and by a piece of amazing luck he found them."

"You do like talking, don't you?" said the late Lady Millicent. "Easy there, now. I'll go quietly. You can't say that I'm not the perfect lady. *Ta-ta,* all!"

"The shoes were wrong," said Poirot dreamily, while I was still too stupefied to speak. "I have made my little observations of your English nation, and a lady, a born lady, is always particular about her shoes. She may have shabby clothes, but she will be well shod. Now, this Lady Millicent had smart, expensive clothes, and cheap shoes. It was not likely that either you or I should have seen the real Lady Millicent; she has been very little in London, and this girl had a certain superficial resemblance which would pass well enough. As I say, the shoes first awakened my suspicions, and then her story—and her veil—were a little melodramatic, eh? The Chinese box with a bogus compromising letter in the top must have been known to all the gang, but the log of wood was the late Mr. Lavington's own idea. *Eh, par exemple,* Hastings, I hope you will not again wound my feelings as you did yesterday by saying that I am unknown to the criminal classes. *Ma foi,* they even employ me when they themselves fail!"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HERBERT HARRIS**

TITLE: ***Blackmail—and a Love Letter***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *He had been careless. The love letter had dropped out of his brief case—and the wrong man had picked it up . . .*

I SAT ALONE IN THE LOUNGE OF MY flat, smoking hard, glancing from time to time at the clock, and waiting for George Manson.

With Manson would come that letter to June, the letter which I had written in much-too-romantic terms, the letter I was about to buy from Manson at any price he cared to ask.

It was unlikely that he would ask more than a hundred. Perhaps fifty. Manson was only an amateur at the game of making easy money, a small-time vulture, a man who had never "thought big" in his life.

As I waited for him, my mind went back to the afternoon of the previous day.

I could visualize the whole scene clearly, with George Manson sprawling indolently on the opposite side of my desk, smirking, licking his lips at the prospect of making me squirm—and pay.

Looking at him that afternoon across my desk, I wondered whatever had prompted me to take him on my sales staff. He was so obviously one of nature's spivs—the small restless eyes, the thin dark mustache like an eyebrow, the black oily hair that needed cutting, the flashy butterfly tie, the too-delicate hands.

"So you aren't going to change your mind about reinstating me?" Manson wanted to know—a challenge rather than an appeal.

"No," I told him, "When I fire somebody, he stays fired. Especially the type who takes advantage of

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my junior typist when my back's turned."

"Well, listen to *him,*" sneered Manson. "The perfect gent. Mr. Goody-Goody himself."

"Get out," I said. "You make me sick."

"The little saint who leaves the girls alone," he went on. "That's good, isn't it, coming from *you.*"

I looked at him sharply. "What are you trying to suggest?"

He studied a manicured fingernail. "Your wife's name is Margaret, I believe?"

"Mind you own business and get out," I said.

"I happen to know it *is* Margaret." He sat very still, looking at me with a derisive smile. "She wouldn't know about this dish called June, would she?"

I frowned at him. "June?"

"You don't know a *thing* about that, do you?" he mocked. "The innocent look won't do you any good—I've got a letter here . . ."—he tapped his breast pocket— ". . . a little billet-doux that begins 'My own darling June,' in your own fair hand. You say some pretty sweet things to June. *Very* sugary. You don't look the type to write mushy stuff."

I could feel my neck reddening with anger and disgust. I made a sudden move toward him.

"Hold it," Manson said. "You needn't try getting the letter. We'd only get rough with each other. Besides, people would want to know what it was all about. I'd have to explain. And Margaret would get to know about the letter, wouldn't she?"

"Where did you get it?" I asked.

He gave me a thin, humorless smile. "You're *so* careless! You pulled it out of your brief case with some papers, and I simply picked it up. Thought it might come in useful. The love letter that *didn't* get posted. I bet you wondered what had happened to it?"

I didn't answer.

Manson went on, "I hope you've been worrying about it a lot. That pleases me. Perhaps if you'd been broadminded enough to put me back on the payroll—*with* an increase—I'd have forgotten all about this letter."

"I'll see you in hell first," I said.

"Brave talk," he snickered, studying his immaculate fingers. "Of course, if I have to look for another job, I'll need a little something to tide me over . . ."

"Yes?"

"In *cash,* pal."

There was a taut silence while I allowed myself to think. Manson raised his head, looking me in the eyes.

"I'll give you a little time to think about it, Mr. Big White Chief. I'll be over your way tomorrow evening. Yes, indeed, I'll look you up in your little love nest. You can introduce me to dear *trusting* Margaret. Perhaps I'll have something to show her."

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"Get out of here," I said.

He got up languidly, donning his fancy trilby at a rakish angle. "Okay, I'll be seeing you tomorrow evening. I can hardly wait to meet Margaret. So long, Mr. *Pure*-in-Heart. I hope you sleep well."

The period of grace was almost up. I had two packets of banknotes, £50 in each. It would be interesting to know how much George Manson would ask for the letter to June.

Presently the doorbell rang, and when I opened the door there was Manson.

He strolled in, his eyes quickly ranging the flat. "Alone?" he asked.

"Sorry to disappoint you," I said. "Margaret's out."

"You worked that nicely," he said. "May assume that we can talk business?"

"You've got the letter?" I asked. He tapped his pocket, "Let's not beat about the bush. How much?"

He smiled. "Look, I'm not *selling* it, chum—I'm giving it to you. Only . . . you did say something about making me a small loan? Fifty nicker, was it?"

So he is only asking 50, I thought. The small mind. "If you want to put it that way," I said, "it doesn't matter." I took out a packet of notes. "Here's your fifty. The letter, please."

He snatched the money as I snatched the letter. At the same time, two men, accompanied by Margaret, stepped from the kitchen.

I watched with pleasure as Manson's natural pallor heightened. I savored the fear in his eyes as Sergeant Wells, a mammoth of a man, led him away.

The other man, Sergeant North, said, "It's always best to put a stopper on these filthy blackmailers, sir, even if your wife does have to know about some little indiscretion."

I looked at Margaret. She had her hand to her mouth trying not to laugh. I showed the Scotland Yard man the letter to June.

"I'm glad now I never dated that letter," I said, "If I had you might not have netted our friend Manson. This letter was written years ago—before I got married."

North raised his eyebrows.

Margaret said, "I came across the letter when I turned out a drawer. I thought it would amuse my husband, so I put it on his desk. He evidently picked it up with some office paper. You see . . ."—Margaret colored slightly—". . . the letter is really to me."

Frowning, North said, "But I thought your name . . ?"

"My wife was on the stage," I explained. "For a time, I called her by her stage name. It was June Knight. Funny how things turn out, isn't it?"

"Yes," said the Sergeant, his eyes twinkling, "but I don't suppose George Manson is laughing."

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When we asked Avram Davidson to suggest an alternate title for "Where Do You Live, Queen Esther?" he considered other titles, then wrote a defense, explanation, and justification for his original choice. Mr. Davidson's words are just too good to be passed over—and, in a sort of minor miracle, they add depth and dimension to his story.

Mr. Davidson is now speaking: Where does *Queen Esther live? In the United States? In the West Indies? In the Twentieth Century of electric toasters, washing machines, and television sets? In the Eighteenth Century of cruel Creole slaveholders, obeah, duppy? She lives in a world composed of all these elements, plus elements that make up a world peculiar to herself and a few thousand other Negroes and mixed-bloods inhabiting remote and tiny islands, a world of Biblical Hebrew first-names and antique African-Amerindian sorcery and archaic English . . . Where, indeed,* do *you live, Queen Esther?—and though we can never live there ourselves, may we not catch at least a fleeting glimpse of it?—where old kings still reign and old gods have never died?*

There is more than a little magic in this unusual story. Savor it—we think you will find it a haunting experience . . .

WHERE DO YOU LIVE, QUEEN ESTHER?

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

COLD, COLD, IT WAS, IN THE ROOM where she lodged, so far from her work. The young people complained of the winter, and those born to the country—icy cold, it was, to them. So how could a foreign woman bear it, and not a young one? She had tried to find another job not so far (none were near). *Oh, my, but a woman your age shouldn't be working, the ladies said. No, no, I couldn't, really.* Kindly indeed. Thank you, mistress.

There was said to be hot water sometimes in the communal bathroom down the hall—the water in the tap in her room was so cold it burned like fire: so strange: hot/cold—but it was always too late when she arrived back from work. Whither she was bound now. Bound indeed.

A long wait on the bare street

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corner for the bus. Icy winds and no doorway, even, to shelter from the winds. In the buses—for there were two, and another wait for the second—if not warm, then not so cold. And at the end, a walk for many blocks. But in the house it was warm. The mistress not up yet.

Mistress . . . Queen Esther thought about Mrs. Raidy, the woman of the house. At first her was startled by the word—to she it mean, a woman live with a man and no marriage lines. But then her grew to like it, Mrs. Raidy did. Like to hear, too, mention of *the Master* and *the young Master,* his brother.

Both of they at table. "That second bus," Queen Esther said, unwrapping her head. "He late again. Me think, just to fret I."

"Oh, a few minutes don't matter. Don't worry about it," the master, Mr. Raidy, said. He never called the maid by name, nor did the mistress, but the boy—

As now, looking up with a white line of milk along his upper lip, he smiled and asked, "Where do you live, Queen Esther?" It was a game they played often. His brother—quick glance at the clock, checking his watch, head half turned to pick up sounds from upstairs, said that he wasn't to bother "her" with his silly question. A pout came over the boy's face, but yielded to her quick reply.

"Me live in the Carver Rooms on Fig Street, near Burr."

His smile broadened. "Fig! That's a fun-ny name for a street . . . But where do you live at home, Queen Esther? *I* know: Spahnish Mahn. And what you call a fig we call a bah-nah-nah. See, Freddy? *I* know."

The older one got up. "Be a good-boynow," he said, and vanished for the day.

The boy winked at her. "Queen Esther from Spanish Man, Santa Marianne, Bee-Double-You-Eye. But I really think it should be Spanish *Main,* Queen Esther." He put his head seriously to one side. "That's what they used to call the Caribbean Sea, you know."

And he fixed with his brooding ugly little face her retreating back as she went down to the cellar to hang her coat and change her shoes.

"The sea surround we on three sides at Spanish Man," she said, returning.

"You should say, 'surrounds *us,*' Queen Esther . . . You have a very funny accent, and you aren't very pretty."

Looking up from her preparations for the second breakfast, she smiled. "True *for* you, me lad."

"But then, neither am I. I look like my father. I'm *his* brother, not *hers,* you know. Do you go swimming much when you live at home, Queen Esther?"

She put up a fresh pot of coffee to drip and plugged in the toaster and set some butter to brown as she beat the eggs; and she told him of how they swim at Spanish Man on Santa Marianna, surrounded on

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three sides by the sea. It was the least of the Lesser Antilles . . . She lived only part of her life in the land she worked in, the rest of the time—in fact, often at the same time—she heard, in the silence and cold of the mainland days and nights, the white surf beating on the white sands and the scuttling of the crabs beneath the breadfruit trees.

"I thought I would come down before you carried that heavy tray all the way upstairs," said the mistress, rubbing her troubled puffy eyes. Her name was Mrs. Eleanor Raidy—she was the master's wife—and her hair was teased up in curlers. She sat down with a grunt, sipped coffee, sighed. "What would I ever do without you?"

She surveyed the breakfast-in-progress. "I hope I'll be able to eat. And to retain. Some mornings," she said, darkly. Her eyes made the rounds once more. "There's no pineapple, I suppose?" she asked faintly. "Grated, with just a little powdered sugar?—Don't go to any extra trouble," she added, as Queen Esther opened the icebox. "Rodney. *Rod*ney? Why do I have to shout and—"

"Yes, El. What?"

"In *that* tone of voice? If it were for my pleasure, I'd say, Nothing. But I see your brother doesn't care if you eat or not. Half a bowl of—"

"I'm finished."

"You are not finished. Finish now."

"I'll be *late,* El. They're waiting for me."

"Then they'll wait. Rush out of here with an empty stomach and then fill up on some rubbish? No. Finish the cereal."

"But it's *cold.*"

"Who let it get cold? I'm not too sure at all I ought to let you go. This Harvey is older than you and he pals around with girls older than he is. Or maybe they just fix themselves up to look—Eat. Did you *hear* what I say? Eat. Most disgusting sight I ever saw, lipstick, and the *clothes?* Don't let me catch you near them. They'll probably be rotten with disease in a few years." Silently, Queen Esther grated pineapple. "I don't like the idea of your going down to the Museum without adult supervision. Who knows what can happen? Last week a boy your age was crushed to death by a truck. Did you have a—*look* at me, young man, when I'm talking to you—did you have a movement?"

"Yes."

"Ugh. If looks could kill. I don't believe you. Go upstairs and—Rod-*NEY!*"

But Rodney had burst into tears and threw down his spoon and rushed from the room. Even as Mrs. Raidy, her mouth open with Shock, tried to catch the maid's eye, he slammed the door behind him and ran down the front steps.

The morning was proceeding as usual.

"And his brother leaves it all to

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me," Mrs. Raidy said, pursuing a piece of pineapple with her tongue. She breathed heavily. "I have you to thank, in part, I may as well say since we are on the subject, for the fact that he wakes up screaming in the middle of the night. I warned you. Didn't I warn you?"

Queen Esther demurred, said she had never spoken of it to the young master since that one time of the warning.

"One time was enough. What was that word? That name? From the superstitious story you were telling him when I interrupted. Guppy?"

"Duppy, mistress." It was simply a tale from the old slave days, Queen Esther reflected. A cruel Creole lady who went to the fields one night to meet she lover, and met a duppy instead. The slaves all heard, but were affrighted to go out; and to this day the pile of stones near Petty Morne is called The Grave of Mistress-Serve-She-Well.—Mistress Raidy had suddenly appeared at the door, as Queen Esther finished the tale, startling Master Rodney.

"Why do you tell the child such stories?" she had demanded, very angry. "See, he's scared to death."

"*You* scared me, El—sneaking up like that."

Queen Esther hastened to try to distract them.

"'Tis only a fancy of the old people. Me never fear no duppy—"

But she was not allowed to finish. The angry words scalded her. And she knew it was the end of any likelihood (never great) that she might be allowed to move her things into the little attic room, and save the hours of journeying through the cutting, searing cold.

Said the mistress, now, "Even the sound of it is stupid . . . He didn't eat much breakfast." She glanced casually out the window at the frost-white ground. "You noticed that, I suppose."

Over the sound of the running water Queen Esther said, Yes. She added detergent to the water. He never did eat much breakfast—but she didn't say this out.

"No idea why, I suppose? No? Nobody's been feeding him anything—that you know of? No spicy West Indian messes, no chicken and rice with bay leaves? Yes, yes, I know: not since that one time. All right. A word to the wise is sufficient." Mrs. Raidy arose. A grimace passed over her face, "Another day. And everything is left to me. Every single thing . . . Don't take all morning with those few dishes."

Chicken and rice, with bay leaves and peppercorns. Queen Esther, thinking about it now, relished the thought. Savory, yes. Old woman in the next yard at home in Spanish Man, her cook it in an iron caldron. Gran'dame Hephsibah, who had been born a slave and still said "wittles" and "vhiskey" . . . Very sage woman. But, now, what was wrong with chicken and rice? The

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boy made a good meal of it, too, before he sister-in-law had come back, unexpected and early. Then shouts and tears and then a dash to the bathroom. "You've made him sick with your nasty rubbish!" But, for true, it wasn't so.

Queen Esther was preparing to vacuum the rug on the second floor when the mistress appeared at the door of the room. She dabbed at her eyes. "You know, I'm not a religious person," she observed, "but I was just thinking: It's a blessing the Good Lord didn't see fit to give me a child. You know why? Because I would've thrown away my life on it just as I'm throwing it away on my father-in-law's child. Can you imagine such a thing? A man fifty-two years old, a widower, suddenly gets it into his head to take a wife half his age—" She rattled away, winding up, "And so now they're both dead, and who has to put up with the results of his being a nasty old goat? No . . . Look. See what your fine young gentleman had hidden under the cushion of his bedroom chair."

And she riffled the pages of a magazine. Queen Esther suppressed a smile. It was only natural, she wanted to say. Young gentlemen liked young ladies. Even up in this cold and frozen land—true, the boy was young. That's why it was natural he only looked—and only at pictures.

"Oh, there's very little gets past *me,* I can assure you. Wait. When he gets back. Museum trips. Dirty pictures. Friends from who knows where. No *more!*"

Queen Esther finished the hall rugs, dusted, started to go in to vacuum the guest room. Mrs. Raidy, she half observed in the mirror, was going downstairs. Just as the mistress passed out of sight, she threw a glance upward. Queen Esther only barely caught it. She frowned. A moment later a faint jar shook the boards beneath her feet. The cellar door. Bad on its hinges. Queen Esther started the vacuum cleaner; a sudden thought made her straighten up, reach for the switch. For a moment she stood without moving. Then she propped the cleaner, still buzzing, in a corner, and flitted down the steps.

There was, off the kitchen, a large broom closet, with a crack in the wall. Queen Esther peered through the crack. Diagonally below in the cellar was an old victrola and on it the maid had draped her coat and overcoat and scarf; next to it were street shoes, not much less broken than the ones she wore around the house.

Mistress Raidy stood next to the gramophone, her head lifted, listening. The hum of the vacuum cleaner filtered through the house. With a quick nod of her head, tight-lipped in concentration, the mistress began going through the pockets of the worn garments. With little grunts of pleasurable vexation she pulled out a half-pint bottle of forti-

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fied wine, some pieces of cassava cake—"That's all we need. A drunken maid. Mice. Roaches. *Oh,* yes." —a smudged hektographed postal card announcing the Grand Annual Festivity of the St. Kitts and Nevis Wesleyan Benevolent Union, a tattered copy of Lucky Tiger Dream Book, a worn envelope . . .

Here she paused to dislodge a cornerless photograph of Queen Esther's brother Samuel in his coffin and to comment, "As handsome as his sister." There were receipts for international postal orders to Samuel's daughter Ada—"Send my money to foreign countries." A change purse with little enough in it, and a flat cigarette tin. This she picked at with nervous fingers, chipping a nail. Clicking her tongue, she got it open, found, with loathing large upon her face—

—a tiny dried frog—a *frog?*—a —surely *not!*—

"Oh!" she said, in a thin, jerky, disgusted voice. "Uh. *Uh!*" She threw the tin away from her, but the thing was bound with a scarlet thread and this caught in her chipped fingernail.

"—out of this *house!*" she raged, flapping her wrist, "and never set foot in it *again,* with her *filthy-ah!*" The thread snapped, the thing flew off and landed in a far corner. She turned to go and had one unsteady foot on the first step when she heard the noise behind her.

Later on, when Queen Esther counted them, she reckoned it as twenty-five steps from the broom closet to the bottom of the cellar stairs. At that moment, though, they seemed to last forever as the screams mounted in intensity, each one seeming to overtake the one before it without time or space for breath between. But they ceased as the maid clattered down the steps, almost tripping over the woman crouched at the bottom.

Queen Esther spared she no glance, then, but faced the thing advancing. Her thrust she hand into she bosom. "Poo!" her spat. "You ugly old duppy! Me never fear no duppy, no, not me!"

And her pulled out the powerful obeah prepared for she long ago by Gran'dame Hephsibah, that sagest of old women, half Ashanti, half Coromanti. The duppy growled and drivvled and bared its worn-down stumps of filthy teeth, but retreated step by step as her came forward, chanting the words of power; till at last it was shriveled and bound once more in the scarlet thread and stowed safely away in the cigarette tin. *Ugly old duppy . . . !*

Mr. Raidy took the sudden death of his wife with stoical calm. His young brother very seldom has nightmares now, and eats heartily of the savory West Indian messes that Queen Esther prepares for all three of them. Hers is the little room in the attic; he chimney passes through one corner of it, and Queen Esther is warm, warm, warm.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHORS:	**JOHN & WARD HAWKINS**
TITLE:	***The Open Mind***
TYPE:	à la **Black Mask**
DETECTIVES:	John Scott and Peter Benson
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The case against Peter Benson, ex-G.I., was airtight: motive a-plenty; his own gun; and he was found on the scene of the crime. But Benson couldn't remember a thing!*

HE SAT IN A STRAIGHT-BACKED dining-room chair. He could make the room stop whirling if he closed one eye and braced himself against the nausea that rose in his throat.

He could see the State Troopers —one leaning against the wall near the front door, the other standing almost within reach of his hand.

He could count the buttons on the coat of the man from the D.A.'s office, though his pointed face seemed to swim in a fog, all black mustache and shining teeth.

And if the rigid effort of his will was strong enough, he could see the group of technicians—the Medical Examiner, photographer, fingerprint men, and John Scott, the fatherly guy from the Homicide Squad—working in the room beyond the archway.

Once, dimly and as though through a misted window, he saw ex-Lieutenant Gregory L. Moore sprawled on a crimson sofa, half his head shot away.

"Benson," the D.A.'s man said, "years ago you might have had a chance. Then, when a veteran went off his trolley and started shooting, the jury called it combat fatigue and apologized for bothering a man with medals. But that day is long gone."

"Now we hang 'em," one of the Troopers said.

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The D.A.'s man looked up. "That coffee ready?"

"I'll see," the Trooper said.

He moved off, and somewhere behind Peter Benson a door creaked and sighed. The room began its dip and whirl again.

Benson squinted at the fireplace blaze in the next room and hung on, waiting for the gray fog-swirl in his mind to clear away. His hands, hard-pressed against his legs, seemed like the hands of another man. The wide-splayed fingers were black against the O.D. wool. *Dirty,* Benson thought in slow surprise, *now that's a funny thing.*

The D.A.'s man said, "Tell that photographer I want him to make a couple of shots in here."

After a little time a lanky man appeared, carrying a Speed Graflex.

"What'll it be?" he said.

"Benson's hands," the D.A.'s man said. "He's got blood on them, and I want proof of that on film before he gets a chance to wash."

The photographer worked with the casual swiftness of an expert. He posed Benson's hands, palms in, against his blouse. "Get his face, too," he said in explanation. "That way his lawyer won't be able to do much talkin' back."

The D.A.'s man said, "No chance of that."

A flashbulb exploded almost in Benson's face. The photographer said, "And one more." This time Benson closed his eyes, but the brilliance seemed to sear through his lids.

The photographer closed his camera and went away. Then the Trooper was standing beside Benson, thrusting a cup into his hands, saying, "Here. Drink this."

The coffee, was black, bitter, and scalding hot. Benson used both hands to get the cup to his mouth. The Trooper watched him narrowly. "What a load you've got," he said in a voice edged with disgust. "And what a hangover you're goin' to have when you get rid of it."

The D.A.'s man said, "That'll do, Calley."

The crowd in the room beyond the archway had broken up. John Scott, the rumpled and shaggy Homicide man, watched a couple of technicians spread a sheet over the body on the sofa and then came slowly into the dining room.

"Any word on the family yet?" he asked.

"No," the D.A.'s man said. "But they'll show up."

"Fine homecoming," Scott said.

He wore an overcoat, though the room was not cold. He was past middle age—a stocky man who had run to flesh. His clothes fitted him badly. His eyes were tired, the eyes of a man who has seen too much of murder and death. His voice was carefully soft.

"I sent that Jap automatic down to Ballistics," he said. "There's no doubt that it's the murder weapon, but we might as well be sure." He

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turned his impersonal glance to Benson. "Moore got three slugs in the face, grouped so your hand would cover all of them. That's nice shooting, even at close range."

"Benson's an expert."

"Most G.I.'s are," Scott said. "It's their business."

Benson finished the coffee and put the cup on the floor beside his chair. He felt a little better, though his thought processes were still blurred. The room had stopped its sickening dip and spin.

Benson swallowed. "How's to let me wash?"

He saw the look that passed between the two, saw the protest of the D.A.'s man die unuttered on his lips. "Why not?" Scott said easily. "You'll feel better if you get some cold water on your face. Maybe you'll be able to tell us what happened."

"I wish I could," Benson said.

John Scott sat on the edge of the tub while Benson scrubbed the blood, dried and black, from his hands, and used towels that had been soaked in cold water on his face.

"I was a sergeant in World War I," Scott said. "But I didn't get the fruit salad you're wearing: Combat Infantryman, Asiatic-Pacific, five battle stars, and some I've never seen before." When Benson didn't answer, he said very softly, "I hated my commanding officer's guts, too."

Benson dried his hands. His image looked back at him from the mirror above the washbowl—the yellow-brown face of a man who has seen much service in the tropic sun. A soldier's face, without expression save for the faintly sullen bend of an almost straight mouth. His hair was close-cropped and very red.

"You're about twenty-five," Scott said.

Benson said, "Twenty-eight, three months ago."

"How long were you a Staff Sergeant?"

"Two years."

Benson fumbled with the knot of his tie. His fingers were as clumsy as the shadowed thoughts that crossed his mind. The old guy was trying to make him talk, doing it the easy way, working from the casual and unimportant to the thing he wanted to know. *And there's nothing I can tell him,* Benson thought desperately.

He turned to stand on wide-braced feet. He was tall, wide of shoulder, thin of hip. He straightened his blouse and brushed at a dark stain on one cuff, a stain that would not come off.

"Are you ready to talk?" Scott asked.

"I can't. I don't know what happened."

There was no surprise in Scott's heavy face, though his mouth may have tightened at the corners. "Okay. I'll tell you—at least, I'll tell

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you what we know. A neighbor heard the shots and called Headquarters. He wasn't sure where the sound had come from, so the radio-car boys shook down the neighborhood. They found the door of this place open and most of the lights on. Moore was on the sofa—dead."

Benson wet his lips. "Yes?"

"You were wobbling around the room," Scott said, "drunker than plenty. You said a lot you shouldn't have said, most of it profane, and all of it to the effect that Moore was a louse and that you were glad he was dead. There was blood on your hand. The gun—a Jap automatic—was on the floor alongside the sofa. Summerill, the D.A.'s man, says you're guilty. He isn't going to look any further for a man to hang. Me, I try to keep an open mind on things like this. I know that's a waste of time, but I'm a sucker for a veteran. I'm one myself. My boy would have been, if he'd lived to get back." He lifted one hand. "You'd better start remembering."

"I've tried," Benson muttered.

"Look, son." There was regret in Scott's voice. "I'd like to give you a break. I can't if you're going to lie to me. We know you were discharged at noon—the separation center says so. We know you landed in town at six o'clock with two other ex-Sergeants—Kelly and Overstreet. We know you started drinking in the bar across from the railroad station."

"That's right," Benson said.

The bar had been long, dimly lighted, and cool. Kelly had bought the first drink—Kelly, the crazy kid with the lopsided grin and eyes that held a hint of wildness still. "Make it three doubles," he'd said, "for three civilians who got back—in one piece." After that, they'd paid in turn, building a bulkwark of glasses in the center of their table.

"To me," Kelly had said. "To *"Mister* Kelly."

Then the talk had turned to the Army, as it always did, to the caste system, officers, and all the gripes of the enlisted man. "They can't push us around *now,"* Overstreet had said. "We got that hunk of paper. We're as good as any of 'em."

Benson remembered stuffing nickels into a pinball machine, while Overstreet, a thin, bitter-mouthed lath of a man, tried to see how many lights he could get. *I was sober then,* he thought. He could remember Kelly rolling poker dice with the barman, and winning.

After that things had become blurred and vague. They'd moved on to another place where there was a juke box and a fat guy who liked to buy drinks for men just back from overseas.

John Scott said, "Well, Benson?"

"I got loaded. The grog hit me hard."

"When did you decide to come out here."

Benson's mind fumbled with

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that. They'd mentioned Moore, for they'd known this was his home town. They'd cursed him with the particular zest of soldiers talking of a hated officer who no longer had the power to reach them. They'd taken turns telling of the things he'd done—at Calcutta, Ledo, and Shingbwiyang.

Benson said, "I wanted my Jap automatic."

Scott said, "Give me that again." His voice was soft.

"That's my gun. He stole it from me."

Interest gleamed in John Scott's eyes. "Well, now," he said, "this is something I want to hear about."

"I was with Merrill's Marauders at Myitkyina," Benson said. "I took that automatic off a Jap officer there. After I got out of the hospital I was transferred into Moore's company, a supply outfit. He tried to buy the gun. When I wouldn't sell, he made me put it in the company strong-box. He pulled out for home three months before I did. He took my gun with him. My gun, and a new pair of mosquito boots I'd never had a chance to wear."

Scott said, "A mistake, perhaps?"

"He was good at mistakes like that," Benson said bitterly. "He was a grade-A louse, all day, every day."

"Could be." Scott's voice was thoughtful, slow. "There are good officers and there are bad ones. What he was isn't important now. But you hated him, and that *is* important. You wanted your gun. You came out here to get it and found him alone. You fought with him; you shot the guy. You were too drunk to get away." He stood up. "Well?" he said roughly. "Isn't that the way it was?"

"I don't know," Benson mumbled. "Believe me."

"That," said Scott, "would be hard to do."

He made a flat, pushing gesture with one hand and Benson went down the hall ahead of him, back to the dining room and the straight chair. Summerill, the D.A.'s man, cocked his head in question at Scott as they came in.

"Nothing we didn't already know," Scott growled. "Any word on Moore's family yet?"

Summerill said, "No, not a thing."

The two Troopers talked quietly beside the red sofa, empty now, in the room beyond the archway.

"The meat wagon just left," Summerill said. "I figure things will be rough enough for Moore's wife without having to look at what's left of her husband."

"Check," John Scott said.

Benson stared at the rug between his feet. *Maybe,* he thought, *maybe I did kill the guy!* And again he forced his aching mind back to the shabby beer hall where the juke box had roared the same tune endlessly, where the fat guy had insisted on buying all the drinks. *Where did I go then?* Benson asked himself.

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What happened after that?

There were answers, fog-shrouded dream pictures, that were no help at all. A bus. Somewhere he had been on a bus, fumbling for change while an impatient driver glared, and a girl who wore wooden shoes laughed at him. The laughter and the wooden shoes were sharply clear in his memory, but he could not remember the face of the girl. And an intersection where he had watched the blinking of the lights for a long time before he had tried to cross—that bit came back to him. Then grass, wet grass, beneath his hands. He'd fallen on someone's lawn, or in a park.

"But where?" he asked himself.

Beyond that strip of wet sod on which he'd fallen, there were only a few tortured flickerings that made no sense at all: the sidewalk canting under his feet in a way somehow enormously funny; a crazy hallway with walls of rubber that would not support his weight.

Then, in the spinning dark that filled his mind, he found the dim memory of a faintly heard, repeated roaring. *Good Lord!* he thought, and cold sweat started on his back. *I was in the house when the shots were fired—when Moore was killed!*

He tried to think past that point, and couldn't. There was nothing until the Trooper had slapped his face.

Summerill's voice said, "She's outside now."

"Take Benson out in the kitchen," John Scott said harshly. "And let me do the talking—all the talking."

Benson and Summerill reached the kitchen in time to hear the staccato rap of high heels on the walk outside.

"What is it?" a woman cried. "Why are all these cars here?"

A child began to whimper, sensing the unadmitted terror in her voice. Summerill turned his sour look to Benson. "Well, Big Shot," he said, "how do you feel now?"

Benson did not answer. The front door had opened and closed. There were voices in the living room now. He heard Anne Moore say, "No—no!" in quick protest. Then, in words that tried hard for steadiness, she said, "Look, Jackie, will you run and play? Mother's busy now."

Benson looked down at his hands. He had scrubbed them until the skin was raw, and yet it seemed as if his fingers were still red with the stain of blood.

The swinging door creaked. A little boy, round-faced, blue-eyed, and very grave, peered in at them. He did not move or speak for a full moment.

Benson sat on a stool beside the sink. Summerill had taken a seat in the breakfast nook. A cold cigar was clamped between his teeth. There was bitter derision in the look he had for Benson. "You asked for it," his eyes seemed to

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say. "This is the son of the man you killed. What have you to say to him?"

The boy said, "What's your name?"

"Peter," Benson said quietly.

"My name's Jack. My daddy's a soldier, too." He came into the room, obviously drawn by the glitter of ribbons on Benson's blouse. "He's got medals."

"I know that," Benson said.

And he wanted desperately to be anywhere but in this white and shining room, with this friendly, smiling child. The little boy came to stand beside the stool and poke at the colored ribbons with an inquisitve finger. Benson winced.

"Purple heart," the little boy said.

Benson swallowed. "That's right."

"They gave you that because you're brave."

"Well—it wasn't quite like that." Benson wet his lips. "Look, Jack," he said, and the words were only a whisper. "How are things with you? Where'd you go tonight?"

"Mommy took me to a movie."

"Did you like the show?"

"Not the scary part."

"But your mother was with you."

"After." The little boy was engrossed in tracing the outline of the blue Presidential Citation that Benson wore. "She took me to see the funny picture, but she didn't come back till after—" He stopped, blue eyes wide.

"After what, Jack?"

"I can't," the boy said. "I promised . . ." He bolted from the room.

"Great God!" Summerill whispered.

"She took him to a double bill," Benson said. "A comedy and a horror picture. From what he said, she was gone at least an hour. She made him promise to keep still. That means she was building an alibi."

"Shut up!" Summerill growled.

"But you'll check it," Benson said.

"Yes, damn you, I will."

A Trooper took Summerill's place in the kitchen. Benson leaned back against the drainboard, eyes closed. He tried to think, but the face of the little boy floated in his mind. And he heard again the small voice, saying proudly, "My daddy's a soldier, too."

"He was a heel," Benson told himself.

And that was true. Whispers had followed Moore throughout his tour of duty in the C.B.I., from Calcutta up the line to Gahauti, Chabua, Ledo, and Shingbwiyang. He had been a captain once, so rumor had it, the C.O. of a quartermaster company. He had lost one bar, one grade of rank, for something that had happened at Bombay, when that city was India's Number One supply port. He had been shifted from job to job, each less important than the last.

"Hey," the Trooper said. "In here."

"Coming," Benson said.

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There were only three people in the living room—John Scott, Summerill, and a woman who was hunched in a chair. The woman was slender and small. Her hair was softly blonde. Her hands were clenched, unmoving, in her lap, and there was a tearless agony in her face.

Summerill said, "Tell her what the boy said."

"You don't have to ask me," Benson told him. "Check with the ushers and the doorman."

"Tell her," Summerill said. "Now."

"No." Anne Moore's voice was small. "I *did* lie to you. Jackie told the truth. I left the theater."

John Scott said, "For how long, Mrs. Moore?"

"For about an hour," she whispered.

"Why?" Summerill said.

The woman did not look at any of them. Her face was drained of color. "I had to," she said. "But it has nothing to do with Greg's death. I didn't kill him. I couldn't have. I loved him too much."

"Where did you go?" Scott asked.

"To—to see a woman," she replied. "To beg her to leave my husband alone." Then, as though that one admission had swept aside all reserve, she went on, "He wasn't in love with her—not really. But he'd been overseas three years, and we weren't used to each other. He missed the excitement of Army life, too. He—"

"Did you see this woman?" Scott asked quietly.

She shook her head. "No. I parked across the street from her home. I waited as long as I could, but she didn't come."

"Did anyone see you there?" Summerill asked.

"No. I don't think so."

Benson went back to the kitchen, to the stool beside the drainboard. He was still there twenty minutes later when John Scott came into the room. Strain had cut deep lines about the big man's mouth.

"The boy—" Benson began.

"What do you care?" Scott said roughly. Then he shrugged. "Maybe you do," he said. "And maybe you got a right to know. The lady next door is taking care of the kid. Summerill's taking Mrs. Moore to the emergency hospital for treatment—shock, and the rest of it. Her nerves are gone. She's about to come apart."

Benson said, "Thank you."

"For what?" There was rage in John Scott's voice. "Nothing's changed—not a damned thing! You're still in this up to your neck. All we've done is prove what we already knew: Greg Moore was all louse. Back from overseas just a month, and he starts playing tag with a beer-hall tramp."

Benson said, "The time checks."

"Okay," Scott said. "So it does."

He crossed the room to drop heavily into a seat in the breakfast nook. "She had the opportunity,

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and she had a motive. I still can't see her blowing Moore's head off, and then going back to the theater to pick up the kid."

"Take me downtown," Benson said. "Book me."

John Scott gave him a long, speculative look. "No," he said. "Not just yet. You're sober now, or close to it. Pretty soon, you should begin to remember what happened."

Benson said, "No dice. I've tried."

"Maybe. But there's the chance that you *do* remember and don't want to talk. If I booked you, there'd be some smart lawyer around to tell you what to say. Here, you're on your own." His voice turned thoughtful. "You found the hole in Mrs. Moore's alibi. That means you're a sharp lad. Could be I'll find a use for you."

"Like giving me rope?"

"Yes," Scott replied. "To hang yourself."

Silence fell between them. Benson wondered just what Scott was trying to do. *I'll have to watch myself, he thought; he's worked out some trap for me.*

"How's to look around?" he asked.

Scott said, "Where, and for what?"

"In the house. For anything I can find."

John Scott was amused. "You think you can find something we missed, some gimmick that will prove you weren't here when the shooting started." He got to his feet. "We still have some waiting to do. Have at it, son. I'll be right on your heels."

Benson went into the living room, with Scott trailing along in his wake. The Trooper who lounged beside the front door said, "Summerill called. He's on his way back," and John Scott made a pleased sound. Then, softly, he said, "Well, boy?"

Benson looked around the room. Experts had been here ahead of him, highly skilled men whose job it was to find everything usable in the way of evidence. They had left chalk marks on the rug and papers piled on the desk. Carefully powdered fingerprints stood out sharply on the chair arms, door casings, and walls.

Benson went past the fireplace where the log fire still crackled cheerfully. He found a cupboard full of Indian jade, ivory, and softly shining brass. The papers on the desk were letters, arranged in order of their dates. And while there was nothing in the room to answer the questions in Benson's mind, there was much to tell of the woman who had made it what it was.

"Find anything?" Scott asked.

Benson said, "Not much."

But there was a growing conviction in his mind. Gregory Moore's wife had waited three years. She'd made a sort of shrine of the small gifts he'd sent her from the side-street bazaars of Calcutta, Karachi, and Bombay. She'd read and re-

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read his letters until they were blurred with handling. There'd been numb despair in her as she'd told them how she'd waited in her parked car—despair, but nothing resembling guilt. *Face it,* Benson told himself, *she didn't kill the guy!*

The bedroom opened on the narrow hall. There was no disorder here, save that the folding doors of a closet were open and one clothes rack had been swung out at right angles to the closet wall. A uniform blouse hung there. Gold overseas stripes glinted on the left sleeve. *Sure,* Benson thought bitterly, *two more than he had a right to wear.*

A row of mosquito boots stood on the closet floor—the glove-soft, handmade boots native to India. Benson counted eleven pairs. He wondered briefly why a man returning to civil life would collect boots that looked well only with a uniform. Then he turned to find Scott regarding him quizzically from the doorway.

"Moore must've clipped a couple of other guys," he said. "Suppose you could find your boots in that batch?"

Benson said, "Why not?"

But the pairs of boots were all alike in size, shape, and color. Benson eyed the long row, displeasure pulling at his mouth. Those he finally chose had faint creases in the soft leather of the ankles. They had been worn but little. He loosened the laces of one shoe and slipped it off. He thrust his foot into the boot, frowned, and looked up to meet Scott's eyes.

"These are too small," he said.

John Scott inclined his head. "Moore stole your boots, or so you say. But his are too small for you. So now I'm wondering if you were telling the truth about the boots. And about that Jap automatic."

"Believe what you like," Benson said.

Headlight glare swung across the windows. There was the sound of a motor in the driveway. "That'll be Summerill," Scott said. "Let's go."

Peter Benson stood with his back to the open fire and watched the three men who came past the Trooper on guard at the living-room door. Ex-Sergeant James Kelly was first—a rumpled Kelly whose orange-red hair had fallen across his bloodshot eyes. Martin Overstreet was only a step behind, thin and lanky, and moving with the solemn and brittle dignity of one not quite sober. The lean and sour Summerill brought up the rear.

"Petey, boy," Kelly said. "How you doin'?"

Overstreet said, "We didn't want to come."

"I'm sorry you had to," Benson said.

Summerill crossed the room to John Scott's side. "Still loop-legged, both of 'em," he said, and the rest was lost in Kelly's aggrieved bellow: "Ain't we your buddies, Pet-

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ey? Okay. When you got troubles, we got troubles."

"Shut up!" Summerill snapped.

Overstreet folded himself gingerly into a chair. There was the shine of sweat on his temples. Kelly was clinging to the back of the sofa. "Petey," he said huskily, "you should've stuck with us. The party was jus' gettin' good."

John Scott said, "Sit down, you!"

"Yes," Kelly said. "Yes—sir."

Benson watched and listened from a seat beside the dying fire. John Scott was genial and fatherly again. "Just a few questions," he said. "We know you both want to help your friend."

The rest was smooth, expertly done. John Scott and Summerill, working as a team, played Overstreet against Kelly in a dozen ways. Twice, Scott's blandness led Kelly to say more than he intended. Each time, it was the snarling Summerill who forced a grudging admission from the little Irishman.

"So Benson did say he'd kill Moore?"

"No." Kelly was sweating and miserable. "He said he'd like to break Moore's back. But that was just talk, see? Drinking talk."

"But Benson said he was coming out here?"

Kelly swallowed. "I ain't real sure."

Summerill said, "What about that, Overstreet?"

"I—I'd rather not say," Overstreet replied.

There was no apparent pattern to the questioning.

Scott said, "What'd you boys do in civil life?"

Overstreet said, "I was a clerk in a jewelry store."

Kelly, still a little drunk, and more than a little angry, snapped, "I was a bum, Mac. So what?"

"You still are," said Summerill.

Benson watched the slow flick and curl of the flames. Something —some half-remembered thing— nudged at his consciousness and then was gone.

The questioning went on and the array of damaging facts grew steadily. Benson had left the beer joint an hour before the shots had been reported. He'd said he was going after his gun. He'd been drunk — fighting drunk — and primed for trouble.

There was purring satisfaction in Summerill's voice as he said, "I guess that about wraps it up."

"Damn it!" Kelly protested. "You been puttin' words in my mouth. I don't remember all that stuff."

Scott said, "How about you, Overstreet?"

"Pete's a friend of mine," Overstreet said. "I thought it was just the liquor talking."

Benson said, "I want my boots."

John Scott's head came around. He held Benson's eyes in a long, steady look. He was about to speak when Summerill said, "The guy's looped."

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"They're my boots." Benson's voice was thick.

John Scott said, "So they are," as though talking to a child. "We'll go get them."

Benson went past the scowling Summerill and down the hall. John Scott padded along in his wake.

When they reached the bedroom, Scott's air of gentle watchfulness dropped away. "Now," he said. "What's this about?"

Benson said, "I'm not sure—yet."

He knelt on the closet floor. He took not one pair of mosquito boots, but a half dozen. He piled them in his arms as though they were sticks.

John Scott's eyes turned dark with thought. He moved aside to let Benson lead the way back to the living room. And he had a faint grin for Summerill's look of astonishment when Benson spilled the boots on the floor.

"What the hell?" Summerill demanded.

"He's playing games," Scott said dryly. "Let him have his fun."

Benson blinked at Kelly. "Try on some boots," he said. "You can have 'em, if they fit."

Kelly whispered, "Petey, boy."

Benson fumbled through the pile to select a pair and tossed them into Kelly's lap. "Go ahead," he said, and pivoted awkwardly around to face the lanky Overstreet. "You, too," he said. "No reason you shouldn't take some home."

Kelly looked up at John Scott, as though waiting for the Homicide man to explode. But Scott shrugged. "Go ahead," he said. "Make the boy happy."

Kelly made short work of trying on the boots. "Can't even get my foot in the top," he reported. "They ain't for me." He grinned. "Us Kellys run to big feet."

Overstreet was sliding his foot into the boot-top, jamming the heel down hard on the floor. "No," he said, "I can't get into them, either."

Benson took the boots from Overstreet's hands. "No good," he said. "No good at all." He turned unsteadily, and with a look of enormous disgust he threw the boots into the fireplace. Sparks showered up, and a red tongue of flame spurted from the embers to touch the shining leather.

Summerill said, "You drunken fool!"

John Scott did not move or speak.

Benson bent over the heap of boots. "They burn better than logs," he said. "We can have a hell of a fine bonfire."

"I get it," Kelly said. "A wake!"

Thickly, Overstreet said, "No!"

Benson spilled more boots into the fireplace.

Overstreet said, "You can't do that!"

"Why not?" Benson asked quietly.

The flames were fatter now. The faint smell of burning leather was

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in the room. Benson turned his back on the fire. He was moving toward the sofa when the lanky Overstreet scrambled out of his chair, face pallid.

"You can't!" Overstreet cried, and dropped to his knees in front of the fireplace to snatch at the boots heaped on the coals. He burned himself and swore, but did not stop his frantic grabbing. When the last of the boots had been rescued, when the last trace of flame had been stamped from the smoldering leather, Overstreet rocked back on his haunches and looked down at his blistered hands.

Benson spoke then. "Here. He held a small penknife in his hand. "Do you want to cut them open, or do you want me to?"

"I don't know—" Overstreet began.

Benson said, "It's too late to play dumb now."

He went past the crouching Overstreet to pick up one of the boots. Bracing it against a chair-arm, he cut a deep X across the blackened toe and pried the quartered leather back. He up-ended the boot and shook a tiny, oilskin-wrapped package from the cut. Overstreet's breath caught in a half whimper.

Benson cut the wrapping away and spilled a half dozen unset jewels on the coffee table—pale stones that shimmered with blue fire under the light. Summerill whispered in surprise. Kelly's eyes became wide.

"Star sapphires!" he said.

"Part of this I can see," John Scott said. "You knew there was something in the toes of the boots after you tried them on in the bedroom. You rigged the rest of this to prove Overstreet knew the value of what was in the boots, and wouldn't let it be destroyed. So what?"

"So I could put the rest of it together," Benson said. "Moore was a captain once; he lost one grade of rank for something he did in Bombay. And when a supply officer gets himself in trouble it's black market operations almost every time. My guess is that Moore sold American supplies to the Indians, and that the case against him wasn't airtight. He was paid in Indian rupees. He couldn't exchange them for American dollars—not without bringing the criminal investigation boys down on him. His problem was to get his profits to the States."

Summerill said, "And so he bought jewels?"

Benson nodded. "Right. But Moore was no jeweler. He had to have expert help. So he looked up the civilian occupations of the men in his command. He found Overstreet."

Scott said, "How does that tie in here?"

"Overstreet wanted a cut of the profits. He came out here tonight to demand a share. Moore wouldn't play that way. The Jap automatic was handy—"

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Overstreet lifted his sweating face to the light. "You're crazy!" he cried. "I was with Kelly. I—"

Benson said, "Tell them your Army job."

"I was a medic, but—"

"You knew how to load our drinks, Kelly's and mine. You had the proper drug. That's how you built your alibi. You doped our drinks, walked us out in the park, waited until we passed out, and then took off for Moore's house. You knew you could come back and tell us we'd been asleep just a couple of minutes and that we'd believe you. A doped drunk hasn't any sense of time."

John Scott said, "But you didn't sleep. You got here."

"I didn't get enough of whatever he fed us," Benson said. "Or maybe I knocked over my glass. I was out on my feet—I got that much—but I wanted my gun. I started out here and I kept coming."

"I remember the park," Kelly said suddenly.

Overstreet shouted, "You're lying! You dirty—"

Scott said, "Search that man!"

Overstreet was on his feet, fists knotted, when the Trooper moved to obey. He tried to turn, tried to run, but he stumbled over the boots scattered across the hearth.

Benson's out-thrust foot did the rest. Overstreet was falling when the Trooper crashed into him from the side and rode him to the floor.

John Scott said, "Now we'll see."

Benson and Kelly were in the kitchen some twenty minutes later when John Scott came through the swinging door.

"You're in the clear, Benson," he said heavily. "Overstreet's our man. He doped your drinks—not as a frame, but so he could get out here first. Moore wouldn't give him a cut of the stones. The Jap automatic was on the shelf with the brass and the jade. Overstreet grabbed it and cut loose. You blundered in then, loop-legged, and out on your feet. Overstreet left you holding the bag. He went back and got Kelly."

"I can't remember much about that," Kelly said.

"He knew you wouldn't—that was his alibi." Scott turned to Benson. "There's one thing I held back on you, Benson. The murder gun was wiped clean of all prints. A man as drunk as you were doesn't remember to wipe a gun. I was pretty sure you were innocent. That's why I played along with you." He shrugged. "We found gun oil on Overstreet's handkerchief. That's when he decided to talk."

"I held back, too," Benson said. "I've been a drinking man for years. Not the best, but a fair hand with a bottle. That C.B.I. liquor is rough, and I put away a lot of it. Tonight is the first time I ever passed out, or had trouble remembering what I'd done. Things like that don't happen to me—not on American bourbon."

John Scott said, "Check, soldier."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **NORMAN DANIELS**

TITLE: ***The Door Without a Key***

TYPE: Human Interest Cop Story

DETECTIVE: Captain Shaw

LOCALE: Farmingham, United States

TIME: One Saturday night

COMMENTS: *The story of an old man suffering from amnesia and of an eight-year-old boy who was also lost . . . and of Captain Shaw and the front door that was never locked.*

THE JANITOR HAD SWEPT OUT THE Main Office after the seven o'clock shift marched out. During the momentary silence Captain Shaw could hear the steady murmur of voices from the detective bureau down the hall. The slamming of steel doors in the cell room at the rear of the building indicated that Doorman Eric Manning was looking over his prisoners—his first chore of the evening.

Behind the long desk which ran almost the length of the room, Captain Shaw prepared himself for the onslaught which usually came of a Saturday night. Sometimes it began with an almost unintelligible phone call for help. Often, a harassed citizen burst into Police Headquarters with an irate or worried complaint. Sometimes a doctor would ask for the emergency ambulance, or there might be an accident on Plainfield Turnpike. It could begin in a score of different ways, and from this first incident would stem the relentless traffic pattern which characterized the Police Station in an Eastern manufacturing town.

Captain Shaw was an old hand at coping with this large assortment of troubles. He was second in command of Headquarters and worked the night shift. He was fifty, getting hefty since he'd taken over a desk job, and Pauline, who was as slim as the day he married her twenty-seven years ago, accused him of nibbling between meals.

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The arrest sheet was ready, the complaint page clean and fresh, and a stack of blank cards for taking down pedigrees was waiting for the first person to be booked. Men were already making their duty calls from the nearest boxes and the machine was busily punching code on the tape which registered each call.

Everything was prepared.

Tonight it began slowly, with a man who opened the door and stepped in hesitantly, letting the door swing shut behind him. Shaw guessed his age at around 65, though it was rather hard to be certain—the man's face was unlined and he was short, hard-packed, and looked vigorous. His hair and clipped mustache were snow-white. His hands were clean, his nails well cared for. His suit was obviously tailor-made, of expensive material, and his shoes had the shining gleam of hand-fashioned, carefully selected leather.

The old man came forward hesitantly, though it was easy to see there was no shyness about him—only an embarrassment to which he wasn't accustomed.

"Something I can do for you?"

"Good evening, Captain," the old man said. "A rather startling thing happened to me a few moments ago. I stepped into a taxicab and when I started to tell the driver where to take me, I didn't know what to say. I don't know who I am, or even what city this is."

"This is Farmingham," Shaw said. "How about papers?"

"Nothing. No money either," the old man said wryly. "I think I'm quite accustomed to carrying money—as much as I wish—because when I went to pay the driver, even though I didn't use his cab, I was considerably surprised to find my pockets empty."

Shaw smiled and nodded. One thing he had long ago learned—these cases needed kindness and a slow approach. He walked to the end of the long counter and opened the gate to allow the old man to come behind the desk. He indicated two chairs, over against the table on which the teletype machine rested.

"You're probably tired," he said. "Sit down. Are you hungry?"

"No—at least, I don't believe I am." The old man accepted the chair gratefully. "I've been doing quite a bit of walking, I think. I feel as though I have." He paused for a moment and looked down at his hands and arms. "It's a weird sensation, Captain, not to know who you are."

Shaw said, "Not unusual though. The unusual aspect of a case like this is for the memory not to return quickly."

"Do you think so?" the old man asked eagerly. "And may I say you're not quite my conception of a policeman. It's silly, of course, but I was under a misapprehension that the police would simply turn

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me over to some . . . well, some medical authority or other."

"We do the best we can, sir. Every case is different. There are no set rules. You haven't been drinking. You don't look as if you've been through a siege of serious illness. Certainly you're not a charity case —not with those clothes, those hands, and your manner."

The old man ran his fingers over the lapel of his coat. "Yes, this is an expensive suit. I wonder if anyone misses me?"

"Depends on how long you've been gone, sir." Shaw picked up the telephone and told a woman with a sharp voice that she could reach Extension Drive by going all the way out Stanley Street. The call box phone rang. He made a note, sat down at the radio desk and gave a brief order for a car to meet an officer at Park and Thornley to bring in a drunk. Next, a speeder, without a license, registration, or identification of any kind, was brought in by a motorcycle officer. Shaw let him make a phone call for someone to come down with his wallet and then sent him to the long bench across the room to sit and wait.

The old man watched with wide-awake interest. Shaw straddled the high stool, swung around on it and smiled at the old man. "All the troubles in the world find their way to this place."

The phone demanded his attention. After a few moments he rang a buzzer in the detective bureau calling for two men who responded promptly. He handed them an address.

"Two men stuck up that store. Callahan, on the beat, has a good idea who they are. He's waiting."

The pair of detectives nodded. One of them gave the old man a steady, appraising look and then smiled, as if he couldn't help himself. The old man smiled too. It was nice to have friends, even if he hadn't seen any of them before in his life.

Captain Shaw booked in a slightly inebriated man, arrested by his probation officer. Eric, the doorman, searched him, then marched him to the cell room. There were several moments of quiet, broken only by the nervous whistling of the man without identification, who sat impatiently waiting across the room.

Shaw said to the old man, "One thing—I sleep when I get home."

"This goes on all night?"

Shaw laughed. "You should see it around eleven."

The old man considered his own problem seriously. "Then while you have a moment, may I ask what you intend to do with me?"

"Well, sir, I have a feeling someone will inquire about you. If not —well, perhaps by resting and relaxing, you'll remember who you are. If that doesn't happen, and no one calls, we'll consider the problem again. Good enough?"

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"I'm grateful," the old man said. "And interested. I had no idea of what goes on here. Nor how often that big door opens."

"Funny thing about that door," Shaw said. "I was a patrolman when they built this station house and there were appropriate ceremonies, including one moment when the Mayor presented the key to that door to Chief Rawlson—who headed the department in those days. The chief tossed the key into the middle of the road and said one thing a police station can do without was a key to the front door. It would never be locked."

The old man nodded. "It's an interesting story. I envy you the telling of it. I wish I could remember back, even a day or two."

"You will," Shaw said. "Sure you're not hungry?"

"Perhaps I'm too excited . . . too worried. No, I'm not at all hungry. Thank you, anyway."

The door opened and the little boy came in. He paused uncertainly, until Shaw's uniform reassured him, and then he came straight across the room and hauled himself up so his chin was level with the top of the desk.

He was runty for his age, but with very large and very blue eyes that seemed to contain all the wisdom of the world buried behind them.

"Hi," he said. "Is this where I come to when I'm lost?"

Shaw regarded the outward innocence of eight years. "Aren't you a bit old to be lost, sonny?"

"Well, I'm not exactly lost. I guess I better explain. You see, my dad—he's a great guy—well, he's an engineer. Y'see, he's so smart he does special work and he goes all around. By auto. Well . . . I got out at a gas station to—ah—buy a candy bar. I guess dad thought I was still in the back seat with our suitcases and stuff because when he got gassed up, he just drove off. I guess that makes me lost, huh?"

Shaw pointed a finger at the gate. "Around there and inside," he said. "What's your name?"

"Mickey Holland." He reached the gate, opened it without hesitation, and sat down beside the old man. He looked at him with frank interest.

The old man said, "Welcome to the lost and found department, Mickey."

"What's that mean?"

"I'm lost too."

The boy's grin lit up his whole face. "Aw, what're you givin' me."

"I am—really. Even more lost than you are, Mickey, because I not only don't know where my friends are, I've forgotten who I am."

The grin faded as the boy's interest increased. "You got what they call amnesia?"

"I suppose so."

Shaw broke in. "I hate to interrupt, Mickey, but who can I phone? Someone your father will likely get in touch with?"

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"Gee, I dunno," Mickey said uncertainly. "I guess he ain't got anybody like that."

"Where was he heading for? What town?"

"I dunno that either. Honest."

It was the emphasis the boy placed on the word "honest" that told Shaw he was lying. The captain let it pass, then asked questions about the license number of the father's car, the make, model—anything that might help. Mickey was vague about everything.

Shaw said, "All right, son, you can sit there too. Maybe your dad will phone."

"Sure," Mickey said. He didn't act as if he thought much of the idea that his father would phone. He tilted his head back and regarded the old man. "No kidding—can't you remember *anything?*"

"Nothing. I don't even know what day it is."

"Saturday. It's Saturday."

"No school, eh?" the old man said.

"I don't go to school much," the boy said. "Me and dad, we move around too much, I guess. I'm not dumb though. I read all the time—every chance I get."

"You learn a great deal traveling around the country."

The boy shook his head. "Not me. Dad parks me in a rooming house." He looked up again and added a touch of spirit to his voice. "I mean a hotel. We just stay at the best places."

"I'm sure you do, Mickey. How about fishing? Do much of that?"

"Uh-uh.

"Too bad." The old man watched Captain Shaw return to some paper work. "I did a lot of it when I was a boy." The strange look in his eyes was a faraway look, though the boy didn't recognize it as that. "There was a stream through my father's property. There were no fish in it, but I always had hopes—and it didn't make any difference if my father laughed at me. My mother didn't. She said hope was a wonderful thing and fishing wasn't just a matter of catching fish."

"My mom's dead," Mickey said. "I don't even remember her."

"I'm sorry," the old man said. "What about a circus?"

"Never been to one." The boy kicked his legs, four inches short of the floor. "Like I said, we move around a lot." He glanced up suddenly. "I thought you couldn't remember anything."

The old man looked startled. "Well, bless my soul, I *am* remembering. Yes . . . yes, there was a brook. My father had a farm. It's all so vague—as if it's in the middle of a mist. But it's there. Part of it's there."

Shaw hadn't missed a word. He swung around on the chair. "You're not a farmer now, sir—not with those hands. It must have been a long time ago."

The old man considered his

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smooth hands and immaculate nails.

"Yes, long ago. My mind manages to reach back that far, but it won't advance. I'm still a boy—like Mickey, here."

"Keep talking about it," Shaw advised. "Can't tell, it might help."

"I'll listen," Mickey said quickly. "I'll be glad to listen."

"Thank you," the old man said gravely. "There was an island—funny thing, how could there be an island on a farm? But it *was* an island and I had a boat. I could row out. Couldn't have been far from shore or I'd never have been permitted—no, it *wasn't* far from shore. It was marshy. Ducks! Wonderful country for ducks, in those days. Gee!"

The picture was now clear in the old man's mind. The veil of mist seemed to have moved behind the picture, but he knew he'd have to penetrate that veil to progress.

"There was one hawk in particular. I called him Bloody Sam. He used to prey on the ducklings. He'd come swooping down and pick up a duckling and he'd fly away, but he'd return soon. Very soon."

"Whyn't you get a gun and shoot him?" Mickey inquired.

"I thought of it. Many, many times, but a boy your age—and I was your age when this happened—couldn't very well have a gun. I asked my father to kill the hawk, but he said the hawk was only doing what he had to do in order to live. He told me Bloody Sam also made off with rats and mice too."

"I'd sure have done something," Mickey said.

"I made up my mind I must do something," the old man said, "but what could I do? The hawk would swoop, the ducks would quack wildly, and the hawk would fly away with his dinner in his talons. I think that hawk made me realize a great deal about life, Mickey."

"Yeah?" Mickey said quickly. "How?"

"I came to know that if the ducks had been as strong—or stronger—than the hawk they wouldn't be bothered. I knew if I didn't want to get hurt, I'd have to be big and strong."

"You ain't small exactly," Mickey said candidly. "But you ain't big either. Are you very strong?"

"There are different kinds of strength," the old man said.

"Money and position," Shaw said unexpectedly. "You found them."

The old man hesitated. "I . . . can't remember. I don't know. I can come only so far and then it turns black again."

Mickey regarded the old man solemnly, then turned his attention to Captain Shaw. "I guess that hawk must have been good and hungry. If he was hungry like that, you can't blame him much." Mickey looked somewhat to the Captain's left. "I guess if I was a hawk, I'd eat a duck right now."

The old man said, "I'm sorry, son. You're hungry." He dug into

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his pocket, made a wry grimace, and shook his head in unaccustomed exasperation.

"The treat will be on the department," Shaw said. "We have a special fund for that." He picked up the phone, dialed. "Captain Shaw. Four sandwiches." He eyed the boy speculatively. "Make that five—something special. This is not cell room chow, you understand. Coffee—lots of it—and milk. A pint. Cake or pie or ice cream. Plenty of that too. Right away—we've got some hungry men here."

"Thank you," the old man said.

"That's swell," Mickey added, bright-eyed.

They ate, while another drunk was brought in, searched, booked, and locked up. Then the nervous man who was waiting for identification looked sheepish when his wife came in with his wallet and said not one word to him all the while the Captain booked him.

Suddenly the big room seemed too small. The patrol wagon brought in a dozen gamblers, rolled out for more, until thirty-odd men were lined up, made to prove their identities, and then required to post small cash bonds in order to be released. They were noisy and good-humored, mostly.

All the while the phone kept ringing, patrolmen called in on the street box line, the teletype clicked out reports of stolen cars, lost children, wanted men. Detectives from the bureau came and went with mysterious culprits, or with witnesses in tow. It was sort of a well ordered bedlam with Captain Shaw handling things as they came, never hurrying, never stopping, until the last of the prisoners had been booked or released. Then he took off his black, horn-rimmed glasses and relaxed.

"How are you two getting along?" he asked.

"Swell," Mickey said.

"It's fascinating," the old man added.

"We get all kinds. Honest men and thieves, those who tell the truth—and confirmed liars". His eyes were on Mickey as he spoke. The boy squirmed uncomfortably and the old man noticed that. There was another flurry of business, mostly telephone and radio. A man came in and indignantly paid a two dollar overtime parking fine, adding a muttered remark about a racket and he hadn't been parked that long.

"That wasn't exactly the truth," the old man said to the boy. "I'll bet even you knew it."

"Sure." Mickey didn't look up.

"Lying is a sort of theft," the old man said slowly. "A liar steals the truth, in a way, and he always causes trouble for someone. Especially the people who believe him and act on what he tells them."

"You think I'm lying?" Mickey managed to look up. The brightness in his eyes was withdrawn.

"I wasn't referring to you," the

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old man said in a kind voice. "I was merely making a general statement."

"Well, I *am* lying." Mickey glanced at the busy Captain. "I don't want him to know—not yet. Please don't tell him. Y'see, I sort of got to make up my mind. You know—get used to this."

"Tell me about it first," the old man urged.

"My dad didn't drive away, like I said. He's no engineer. He picks fruit, and digs potatoes, and works in bars sometimes. He never stays in one place long and we lived in the car mostly. I guess I got in his way a lot and he . . . well, he met someone else. I—I guess he liked her better'n me. We were passing through this town and he saw a home for kids and he stopped the car and told me to get out." Mickey rubbed at his eyes, but he didn't lose a tear. "He said I was to go right up and ask them to take me in and some day he'd come back for me. But he won't. And you know something—I don't care. I don't care if he *never* comes back!"

"Hmm," the old man said. "That puts you on the loose, doesn't it?"

"Yeah. I guess they'll send me to that home, and maybe it won't be so bad, but I wanted to walk around a little first. I thought . . . maybe . . . dad would come back. But he didn't. And then I didn't know what to do, so I thought the cops would help me."

"I'm sorry," the old man said, "about your father. You, nor I, can't realize what sort of burden he must have been living under. I'm sure he really believed you'd be better off in a home."

"*She* didn't care what happened to me," the boy said flatly. "Everything was okay until *she* came along. I think," the boy added, with adult seriousness, "I'll be a cop when I grow up."

"Fine. I thought I'd like that once. I suppose every body does, but not many get a chance at watching how a police station operates, as you are privileged to be doing right now."

"If you didn't become a cop, what did you become?" the boy asked.

"Why, I went to college and . . ." The old man winced and pressed fingertips to his forehead. "I can't remember."

"Oh, yeah," Mickey said, "I forgot you can't remember."

"It's got to come back to me," the old man said, "it's got to come back sometine."

The boy's hand crept out hesitantly and rested on the old man's arm. His eyes were bright again. "Honest, mister, I'm sorry. I wish I could help you remember."

The old man smiled. "Thank you, Mickey."

Captain Shaw missed very little, for he had long ago grown ears on the back of his head. He considered putting out a statewide alarm for an old car with a man and woman in

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it, but he hesitated. In some cases speed was essential; in others it could be disastrous.

He decided to let it go for the time being and stayed away from the strangely matched pair in his custody. A desk man like Shaw learns more psychology than a college student majoring in the subject. He learns patience and tact, and he learns that people can often solve their own problems in a highly efficient manner if only they're let alone long enough to do so.

Mickey and the old man had been silent for several minutes now, but neither paid much attention to another brief spurt of activity around them. There were two assault arrest, more parking tickets, more stolen cars, and two emergencies which probably would turn out to be nothing at all.

"You feel okay?" Mickey asked the old man.

The old man opened his tightly closed eyes. "Oh, yes. I'm sorry I went off like that. I was thinking—what if I'm just someone who needs help. Perhaps I'm not what I think I am. Perhaps I've no one—neither money nor home nor friends. It's possible, you know. Especially for a man who can't remember."

"I'm your friend," Mickey said casually. "I guess the Captain is too. You got nothing to worry about much."

"Thank you. I feel better."

"Sure," Mickey said. "I feel okay too. What'll they do with us?"

"I really can't say. There's so much going on around this place—we're not very important, you and I, Mickey. Not to a policeman, anyway."

Captain Shaw glanced at the wall clock. There was less than an hour left of his tour of duty and he was growing worried. Lieutenant Brady, coming on at midnight, would hardly be in a position to appreciate the problem of one old man with amnesia and one eight-year-old boy who'd been deliberately deserted. If something was to be done about them, it had to be now.

The old man? The hospital, of course. Where else do you send a harmless man whose mind has turned blank? The boy? The home for boys that he appeared to dread so. The law would then be satisfied. He would have done his sworn duty. What happened to these two lost souls afterward was not his affair. Not officially, and while he wore the uniform, everything must be official.

He'd been hoping for two things—that someone would come or call, searching for the old man. And that Mickey's father might have a change of heart and return for him. It wasn't that Pauline would resent his bringing this odd pair home. She'd be delighted, in fact, but there were others who wouldn't see it that way. The Chief, for instance. He always acted on the letter of the law.

Mickey drank what was left in his container of milk and began to

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look sleepy. The old man automatically drew an arm about him and the boy rested his cheek against the smooth, fine texture of the coat.

"I've had this experience before," the old man said. "Children, grandchildren . . . both . . . I don't know, but it did happen. A long time ago, so probably it was children. And there was Madge . . ."

The name, spoken almost absentmindedly, made him react so sharply that the sleepy boy woke up.

"Madge," the old man said. "There was someone named Madge, someone I loved. She would have been my wife . . . my wife . . . and I associate her name with emptiness and sadness—so I must have lost her."

The Captain stood before him. "Madge," he said. "I knew a girl named Madge once—not your Madge, of course, but I recall she was vivacious and full of fun."

"Yes," the old man said eagerly. "Yes, she was like that." His voice faltered and a slackness came over his face. "I think she was. I had her there . . . for just a moment. She was within reaching distance of my mind, and she slipped away. Slipped away . . ."

Captain Shaw had only a few minutes left. They might be expended on some business which would crop up unexpectedly. The unexpected was the rule on this job—so if he was going to do something about these two, it must be now.

He never considered himself a psychologist and certainly not an expert on gerontology or juvenile problems. The only approach he could use had all the finesse of a sledge-hammer.

He said, "Well, my two friends, it's getting late. I'll go off duty in a few minutes and you both come under the heading of unfinished business. It's a rule here that no desk officer leaves any unfinished business for the man who relieves him."

"What's that mean?" the boy asked. "Quiet, Mickey," the old man said.

"Well," Shaw told the old man, "I'll have to lock you up."

"What're you gonna lock him up for?" Mickey demanded, "Heck, he hasn't done anything."

"That's all right, Mickey," the old man said. "I have to be taken care of one way or another."

"You're destitute," Shaw said impersonally. "Not a penny, and not even a name or an address. Obviously, you can't take care of yourself."

"Obviously," the old man agreed hopelessly.

The boy was wide-eyed with a hint of tears to come. The old man placed a protective arm around him.

"What about Mickey?" he asked.

"I heard what he told you—about what really happened to him," Shaw said. "I don't like liars, so I have little sympathy for him. Even if I had, it's quite clear what I'm compelled to do. He has no one to

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take care of him—like yourself, old man, he has no means of support. Therefore, he becomes a public charge . . . the home."

The old man pushed himself forward on the chair. "The devil it does," he said. "You can't push people around like this! The boy will not go to any home, any institution. I have the means to prevent that—the money too." He stood up suddenly and thrust his face closer to Shaw's. "I also have the influence, and if you don't believe me, try stepping on my toes."

Shaw's face was a mask. Mickey slid off the chair and seized the old man's hand tightly.

"You're getting him sore, mister," he said. "Please don't get him sore. I'll do what he says. It's okay."

"You're doggone right you'll do as I say," Shaw shouted angrily. "Both of you!"

"None of that blown-up authority," the old man warned. "Don't use it on me. I give orders. I don't take them."

"Prove it!" Shaw bellowed.

The old man seized Shaw's uniform jacket with one hand. "Call up Senator Fairchild. Get the Governor on the phone—or Larkin of the Federal Reserve. Ask anybody if Leonard Eldridge hasn't the connections to . . ."

"Hello, Mr. Leonard Eldridge," Shaw said. "I've heard of you—Everybody in this state has. What are you doing so far from home? You live in Hartdale."

"Yes! Yes, that's where I live! With a flock of maids and cleaning women, and secretaries and auditors. That's what I was trying to get away from! I got so tired of the whole kit and kaboodle, I simply ran out. I ran away from it all because I couldn't stand it any longer. I went looking for someone . . . someone . . . I don't know . . ."

"Madge?" Shaw asked quickly. Memory was slipping back.

"Madge? Dead! She was my wife—she's dead. And my son—I remember now—killed in the war." He looked down at the upturned face of Mickey. "I guess I'm worse off that you are, boy. I haven't anyone—not even the kind who drive away and leave me on my own."

Shaw said, "Mr. Eldridge, why don't you phone your home and have a car sent here? Or better than that, check into a hotel and have your people come in the morning—and bring money."

"A fine idea," Eldridge said. "But the boy. . . ?"

"You'd do me a favor by taking him with you, sir," Shaw said. "Save the department a great deal of trouble, and I'm sure we can iron the whole thing out later. After the two of you get to know one another."

Lieutenant Brady came on duty five minutes late. He checked the arrest sheet, the squawk sheet, read the general orders, and lit a cigar. After midnight the desk officer was permitted to smoke.

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"Anything important happen tonight?" he asked casually.

"Well, yes," Shaw said. "Nothing to concern yourself about. Just—well, something I fixed up."

"Just a little something, I suppose," he said lightly. "Maybe you solved a murder—or tracked down an arsonist or a burglar?"

Shaw chuckled. "No, not a murder, not a burglar or arsonist. Nor wars, nor floods nor epidemics. This, my friend, was exactly what I said it was—important."

Brady mused on that for a few puffs, and then the phone rang and he was in charge. Shaw unbuttoned his jacket as he started toward the locker room. Pauline would be waiting up as usual. He'd have something to tell her tonight. In a way, he was sorry the important Mr. Eldridge had recovered his memory. Pauline would have said her husband's heart was as big as his head was empty—but he'd have enjoyed the company of an old man with no memory, and a boy with no home.

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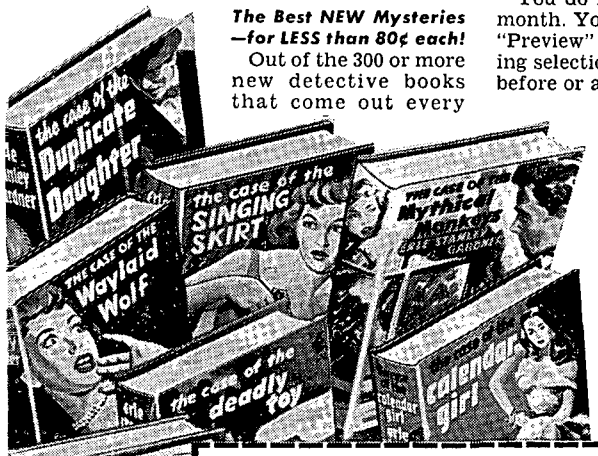
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